

THE GOLDEN LOTUS

THE GOLDEN LOTUS

A Translation, from the Chinese original,
of the novel Chin P'ing Mei

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THE GOLDEN LOTUS

Chapter Fifty-four

YING PO-CHÜEH GIVES A PARTY

Precious wine is worth a fortune
Let not the wine-cups, then, stay idle in the hand
In the presence of the flowers.
Rise and dance and drink with the flowers.
The flowers are silent
They know men love them.

Let us not say farewell till we have drunk our fill.
Look at the flowers
Already one is faded.
Yet, though the flowers fade
Next year they will be as beautiful again.
So much cannot be said of these fair maidens.

IT was arranged between Nun Wang, the Lady of the Vase and the Moon Lady that the religious ceremony should be performed next day. The Moon Lady sent all the necessary things to the temple. She said to Ch'ên Ching-chi: "Tomorrow the Sixth Lady is making intercession for a blessing on her child, and you must go to the service." But Ching-chi said:

"Father is going to the gardens outside the city and I shall have to look after the shop. It would be better to ask someone else to go to the ceremony." As a matter of fact, Ching-chi, hearing that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was going to a party with Ying Po-chüeh, thought it would be an excellent opportunity for him to amuse himself with Golden Lotus. The Moon Lady believed that he really was going to look after the shop, so she did not press him any further. She told Shu T'ung to go to the service.

While Hsi-mên Ch'ing, Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh were still talking, Ch'in T'ung came back. "I have been for the two singing-girls," he said. "Silver Maid is not well. She will not be able to go to-morrow, and Golden Bracelet will take her place."

"You had better go and tell Elegance," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. Ch'ang declared that as they were going outside the city they did not need a second girl. The two men went away.

The next day, Hsi-mên Ch'ing got up before dawn. The Moon Lady had arranged breakfast for him and, immediately he had eaten it, he got into a sedan-chair and went to the temple of Kuan Yin for the beginning of the service. Nun Wang came to the temple gate to meet him.

The nun read the prayers, and afterwards Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to change his clothes. Tea, cakes and fruits were brought for him, but he took only a mouthful of tea. Then he went back to his chair, bidding Shu T'ung stay for the remainder of the service. When he reached home, the sun had only just risen, but Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh had already arrived.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed at them. "Who ever heard of invitations for breakfast?" he said. "It is true I am not busy to-day, but we can't go till afternoon."

"You don't understand, Brother," Ying Po-chüeh said. "Twenty *li* outside the city there is a park belonging to a eunuch. It is beautiful and it is quiet. But it is so big that it would take two days at least to appreciate all its beauties. We must go early and spend all day there."

"Brother," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said, "you have nothing particular to do to-day. That is why we came so early. Let us start at once."

"If you will have it so," said Hsi-mên, "you go first and I will join you there."

The two men set out, but, sending the attendants in advance, they themselves went to the bawdy-house and waited for Golden Bracelet to go with them. Ying Po-chüeh had arranged for refreshments and engaged two actors.

Some time after Po-chüeh had gone Hsi-mên Ch'ing got into his sedan-chair and went out of the city.

A thousand trees cast a deep shadow
And a brook meanders through them.
White walls enclose the ever-blooming flowers
And pleasant houses screen the quiet landscape.
Peach flowers blossoming at Wu Ling

Make the fisherman lose his way.
Plum blossoms flowering on the Yü Mountains
And the poets exchange verses in the sunshine.
It is paradise on earth.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not help exclaiming at the beauty of the scenery. He got out of his sedan-chair and went into the gardens. Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh came to welcome him and they went together to an arbour. Golden Bracelet and the actors kotowed to him. Tea was served. Po-chüeh would have had wine, but Hsi-mên said: "There is no hurry. Let us take a stroll together." He took Golden Bracelet's hand and Ying Po-chüeh led the way. They went to a verandah, then, following the vermilion railings, came to a place where there were many willow-trees and an arbour of roses. They passed the T'ai Hu stone and the Pavilion of the Pine Winds. So they came to the Pavilion of Unusual Characters. Behind this were about thirty plum-trees, and among them a small high building called the Tower of the Plums. In this were many poems written by famous men. Hsi-mên Ch'ing studied them attentively. They went to the peony bed, where there were many different kinds of rare peonies. Then they turned to the north, and here was the bamboo grove with a small pavilion with the sign 'Listen to the rustling of the bamboos', and a small arbour called 'The Coming of the Phoenix'. The signs were all written by men of great renown for their skill with the brush. On the right was a gold-fish pond and, on the bank, a small arbour with a sign: 'Here you may enjoy the water.' They leaned on the red railings for a while and watched the gold-fish swimming about in the water. They made the pond seem like an embroidered coverlet. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was especially pleased with this. But Ying Po-chüeh led him to another high building. This was 'The Tower for Listening to the Moon'. There were many poems by famous men here also, and panels of carved wood painted in characters of green. They went down from the building and turned towards the East. There, they saw a great artificial mound with a cave in it called the Cave of the Eight Immortals. In the cave was a marble chess table. Iron flutes and brass long flutes hung upon the walls. It was a place where immortals might have dwelt. When they came out of it they climbed the mound

and from its summit could see the whole extent of the garden.

They had walked for some time and Ch'ang Chih-chieh said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Brother, you must be tired. Let us rest in the harbour before we start out again."

"But we haven't been round one-tenth of the garden," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "How can we say that we are tired? Don't you know that sedan-chair men walk a hundred *li* a day?"

They laughed but went to the harbour. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took the place of honour with Ch'ang Chih-chieh on one side of him and Ying Po-chüeh on the other. Golden Bracelet sat beside Hsi-mên. "I must offer you my most sincere thanks for all your trouble," Hsi-mên said to his hosts.

"Brother, it is not worth mentioning," said Po-chüeh. "This is but a poor cup of wine that I am able to offer you."

They drank together, then the two actors came before them. They took their instruments and sang a new song: 'Every word is exquisite, like a pattern of flowers.' They sang very sweetly and their voices lingered. Hsi-mên Ch'ing praised them. "It is a pity they are boys," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said. "If they were girls, no price would be too high for them."

"If they were girls," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "we should have asked them to sit down before this. We should not have allowed them to stand and sing."

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "you are an officer to the manner born and what you say always bears the stamp of authority."

Everybody laughed. They drank their wine, and Po-chüeh, taking a large cup, suggested that they should play the game of giving orders. Hsi-mên was not anxious to begin, but Po-chüeh pressed him, and at last he agreed. "I will take the words Wind, Flower, Snow and Moon. I will begin; Brother Ch'ang shall be next; then our host, and, lastly, Golden Bracelet. Each must make a verse and bring into it one of my four words. When he begins, he must drink a cup; and, if he fails, he must drink a second cup and tell a story. If the story is a poor one, he must tell another. I will begin." He took his cup and drank it. "The clouds are few, the wind gentle. It is nearly noon.' Now, Brother Ch'ang, it is your turn."

Ch'ang drank his cup and said: "Chasing the flowers and following the willows, I crossed the stream." Then it was the turn of the host. Ying Po-chüeh drank his cup of wine, but he seemed dazed and could not get out a word.

"Brother Ying," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "you must pay your forfeit and drink another cup."

"Let me think a moment," Po-chüeh said. He racked his brains, and Hsi-mên asked him again. "Of the glory of Spring," he began, "a few degrees have been revealed."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing roared with laughter. "That doesn't include a single one of my words," he cried. "That verse won't do. You'll have to drink two cups."

They called for Po-chüeh's story.

"Once there was a scholar on his way to the Capital," Po-chüeh began. "His boat was anchored in the Yang-tsü. At nightfall he asked the boatman to go and anchor somewhere else, for, he said, 'There are bandits in this place.' 'Where?' said the boatman. 'Don't you see that inscription on the stone tablet there, 'Bandits on the river'?' The boatman laughed and said: 'That isn't, 'bandits on the river''. How could you make such a mistake? It is not "bandit" but "poem". 'Well,' said the scholar, 'they both look alike to me.'"

"I don't believe any scholar would make such a mistake," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing.

"Brother Ying," said Ch'ang Chih-chieh, "you must drink ten big cups."

"Why?" said Ying Po-chüeh, astonished.

"Think for yourself," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was reputed to be the wealthiest man in all Shan-tung and, when Po-chüeh had spoken in his story of the scholar's confusing the word 'poem' for 'bandit', he might have been taken to refer to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, for the word for a very wealthy man has the same sound.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing himself had not at once seen the point, but now he understood. Po-chüeh realised that he had made a slip. He drank two cups of wine and asked to be forgiven.

"If you did not deserve to be punished, I would not punish you," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but you do deserve it, and I cannot let you off."

Po-chüeh felt uncomfortable, but he drank a few cups more. "You have too much to say," he said to Ch'ang Chih-chieh.

"Now you must tell us another story," Hsi-mên said. But Po-chüeh was afraid to commit himself again. "Never mind," Hsi-mên said, "it is only fun, come along." Po-chüeh felt more at ease.

"When Confucius was travelling in the west," he began, "someone caught a unicorn. For some reason Confucius did not see it and, day and night, he wept and cried bitterly in his house. His disciples were afraid that he would fall ill, so they got a bull, dressed it up in copper coins and tried to persuade him that this was the animal. But the moment Confucius set eyes on it he saw through their trick. 'Obviously,' he said, 'this is a very wealthy bull, but why do you try to make out that it is a unicorn?'"

When he had finished his story, Po-chüeh fell upon his knees before Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "I know I am not fit to live," he said, "but I really didn't mean any harm."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed and told him to stand up. Golden Bracelet laughed too. "Beggar Ying," she said, "you are always trying to be smart at other people's expense. Now you've put your foot in it. Father, don't pay any heed to him."

Po-chüeh was annoyed at this. He went to Golden Bracelet and struck her on the head. "That rascal Ch'ang," he said, "is bad enough. There was no need for you, you little whore, to say anything more." He had hit her hard and hurt her. She dared not cry but it was clear that she was very much put out.

"You dog," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing, "first you make rude jokes about me and then you begin hitting people. What punishment do you really want?"

Po-chüeh laughed and put his arm round Golden Bracelet. "My daughter," he said, "where were you brought up with such tender care that you are ready to cry at a little tap like that? It surprises me that you are able to put up with things as big as a donkey's."

Golden Bracelet turned her head and looked scornfully at him. "Beggar," she said, "pray when were you there to see? You are talking nonsense. It is your wife who has to endure a thing as big as a donkey's."

"Why, of course I've seen," Po-chüeh said, laughing. "The gentleman is famous for his beauty, his asininity, wealth, youth and idleness. He is just the sort of man you like. And that reminds me of another story. There was once a young lady whose thing was getting rather the worse for wear. Somebody told her that if she put a piece of alum into it, it would recover its former tightness. This the young lady did, but she found that it tightened her up so much that it hurt. This made her very sorrowful. She was standing outside her gate when a passer-by said: 'That little whore is trying to look like Pa Wang.' The young lady heard him. 'What!' she said, 'Pa Wang indeed! Why, I can't even manage Fan K'uai!'"

They all laughed at this, even Golden Bracelet. Ying Po-chüeh finished his wine and offered another cup to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, asking him to take the last turn in the game. "It is Golden Bracelet's turn," Hsi-mên said. Golden Bracelet would not play, and Ch'ang urged Hsi-mên. Hsi-mên drank a cup of wine and said: "Up the staircase of the clouds, let us go to the cavern of the immortals in the palace of the moon." So the game was finished.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing changed his clothes and went for a stroll. Po-chüeh was still calling for more refreshment. Suddenly he noticed that Golden Bracelet had disappeared. He looked about and found that she had gone round the artificial mound and was relieving herself behind the arbour of roses. He picked a branch from a flowering shrub and quietly went over to her. Squatting down behind her, he touched the heart of her flower. Golden Bracelet was startled, jumped up before she had finished what she was about, and wet her drawers. At that moment Ch'ang Chih-chieh crept up behind Po-chüeh and pushed him so violently that he fell forward and caught all the piss in his face. He sprang to his feet, laughingly cursed Ch'ang Chih-chieh, and ran after him to beat him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing stood beside a pine-tree and roared with laughter. Even Golden Bracelet laughed and skipped with delight. "Beggar Ying," she said, "now you've got what you deserved." They went back to the table.

"Now, you dog," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "you have had your joke at our expense. What about telling us a story against yourself?"

"I don't mind in the least," Po-chüeh said. "One day a rich man let out a fart. A man standing by, one who always lived by sponging on the rich man, said: 'I smell nothing.' This alarmed the rich man. 'That's bad,' he said; 'if there is no smell to my farts there must be something wrong with me. I must see a doctor.' 'Wait a moment,' said the sponger, 'I will make sure.' He put out his nose and pretended to sniff again. Then he smacked his lips. 'Ah,' said he, 'there is a splendid after-taste. You have nothing to worry about.'"

They all laughed. Ch'ang Chih-chieh said: "You have made rude remarks about our brother, but why should you draw a picture of me?" They all laughed again. Ying Po-chüeh asked Ch'ang Chih-chieh to guess fingers with Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and Golden Bracelet sang songs for them.

Ch'ên Ching-chi, when he was sure that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had gone out, dressed himself and waited for an opportunity to approach Golden Lotus. He dared not go to her openly, but went to the Snow Cavern hoping that she might be there. He waited for a long time but she did not come. At last he lost patience and went to her room. Fortunately no one saw him. When he came to the door he could hear her singing in a low sweet voice: "Why did you love me and then forget me?" This seemed a proof that she really loved him. He rushed into the room and threw his arms about her. "How could I ever forget you?" he said. "Yesterday, my darling, the Great Lady told me to go to the temple of Kuan Yin, but I would not go. I was thinking of you all the time. To-day Father has gone to drink wine, and I went to the Snow Cavern to find you, but though I waited and watched until the eyes nearly came out of my head, your dainty shadow never appeared. Now I have thrown discretion to the winds and come to you here."

"Don't speak so loud," Golden Lotus said, "there will be trouble if you are heard."

Suddenly, through the window, she saw Tiny Jade coming with a roll of white silk. The girl turned and went away again. "That maid must have forgotten something," Golden Lotus said. "Did you see how she turned and went back?" She thought it probable that the girl would return. "You must go at once," she said. "We can do nothing now." Ch'ên

Ching-chi was made to vanish like a whiff of smoke. Golden Lotus was right. The Moon Lady had told Tiny Jade to take the silk to her so that she could draw the pattern of a skirt, but the girl had forgotten to bring the pattern and went back for it. Luckily the maid did not catch Golden Lotus with Ching-chi. When she returned with the pattern he had slipped away. But when Golden Lotus took the silk her hands were trembling.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and his friends were becoming tipsy, and he was anxious to go home. Po-chüeh urged him to stay. He knelt down and said: "Brother, is it because you are angry with me on account of that joke I made about you that I can't persuade you to stay?"

Hsi-mên laughed. "You dog," he said, "nobody bothers about what you say."

Po-chüeh took a large cup and filled it for Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Ch'ang Chih-chieh offered him some fruits. Hsi-mên thanked his host and prepared to leave. He gave Golden Bracelet a tael of silver and told Tai An to give the young actors three ch'iens each. "I am drunk," he said as he got into his sedan-chair. The two boys followed him. Po-chüeh told the servants to clear away and dismissed the young actors. He rode back to the city beside Golden Bracelet's sedan-chair.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing reached home the sun had set. He went to sleep with the Lady of the Vase. The next day she said to him: "Ever since the baby was born there has been something wrong with me. When I look in the mirror I see how pale my face is. I never want to eat or drink, and, when I try to walk, my legs seem to give way beneath me. If it is anything serious, what will become of my baby?"

Hsi-mên saw that she was crying. "I will send for Doctor Jên," he said. "I am sure you will be all right when you have had some medicine." He told Shu T'ung to write a letter and ask Dr Jên to come. Shu T'ung went on the errand and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the hall. Ying Po-chüeh came to thank him for coming to the party the day before, and Hsi-mên, in return, thanked him. They sat and talked. Then Shu T'ung came and said: "Doctor Jên is here." Hsi-mên Ch'ing at once went to receive him, introduced him to Ying

Po-chüeh, and the three men sat down together. Shu T'ung brought tea.

"Kindly tell me who is ill," Dr Jên said.

"My sixth wife is not feeling very well. I shall be grateful if you will make a careful examination."

"Is that the lady who had a baby?" Dr Jên said.

"Yes," said Hsi-mên, "but I don't know why she should not be well."

"Let me go and see her," the doctor said. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the Lady of the Vase's room. The doctor sat by the bedside and one of the maids opened the curtains very slightly. The Lady of the Vase put out her right hand and rested it upon a case of books wrapped in a handkerchief.

"First, I will try the pulse," Dr Jên said. When he had found the place he put three fingers on the pulse. He bent his head and examined it carefully for some time. Then he removed his hand and the Lady of the Vase slowly withdrew hers. She stretched out her left hand and laid it on the books. Dr Jên examined it. Then he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "I have now examined the lady's pulse and—I am very sorry—I must see her face."

"We are good friends," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "there need be no difficulty about that." He told the maids to pull the curtains aside. Dr Jên looked at his patient. Her face was like a peach-blossom, her eyebrows dark like willow-leaves. He looked at her for a minute, then said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "I have seen your lady's face, but I have not come upon any sign of anything serious. I must have more details about her illness. We doctors have to find things out from our patients themselves."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent for Heart's Delight. She came in, dressed in her best clothes, made a reverence to the doctor and told him about her mistress's illness; how her mouth was always parched, and how she suffered from sleeplessness. Dr Jên stood up and bowed. He said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "I don't believe it is anything serious. In people of the common sort, their bodies are so tough that their blood can stand anything, and we can give them almost any kind of medicine. If we make a slight mistake, no great harm is done. But a lady like yours is more delicate. We must not allow the slightest

possibility of error, for, if we give her anything which is not exactly what we should give, there may be serious danger. That is why I have to ask questions and find out what she has to say. It is essential. The other day I went to see his Lordship Wang's wife. Her illness was very similar to your lady's. I asked a few questions, investigated the symptoms and examined her, and so got an excellent idea of the trouble. I went home, read some of the prescriptions of the ancients and compared them with my own ideas upon the subject. I gave her some medicine to get rid of her fever and something to strengthen her at the source of her weakness. The treatment was most effective. The lady took only three or four doses and then she was completely recovered. His Lordship was most grateful. He sent me silks and money, and his lady sent me something too. He also sent me a special sign-board and, when he gave it to me, the musicians played so loud that the sound reached the heavens. There was inscribed upon it: 'The Learned Doctor with Miraculous Powers.' A few days ago a friend of mine came to see me, and he says the characters are done in the *Yen* style. Every character seems to stand out. When I was young I did a great deal of reading. It was only because my family had come down in the world that I began to practise the art of medicine. I think I can prove that the title of learned doctor was not altogether undeserved."

"I feel more satisfied now that you tell me there is nothing serious," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I may say, Doctor, that, though I have more than one wife, this is the only one for whom I really care. She has borne me a son and I look to her to rear him. We must not have any trouble. I have confidence in your remarkable skill. She shall be carefully looked after, and, when she gets well, you shall have a handsome fee. I am only a soldier and cannot attempt to rival his Lordship, but I know what is right and proper."

"Since you are so kind," Dr Jên said, "I will not take any payment from you. Indeed I would rather that you should not even pay for the medicine."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed heartily. "I am not the sort of man to take medicine for nothing," he said. "And that reminds me of a very interesting story. I once heard of a man who said that a cat with the mange can be cured by a certain black

powder. Somebody asked him what would cure a mangy dog. 'Give it some white medicine,'¹ the other said. So, Doctor, you see white medicine is fit only for dogs."

Dr Jên clapped his hands and laughed. "Then I don't know what you will do to me if my prescription happens to be for white medicine." They both laughed. "In that case you will have to give me another sign instead of a fee," Dr Jên said. They laughed again. The doctor got up and they came away.

¹ This expression also means medicine given gratis.

THE IMPERIAL TUTOR

WHEN Dr Jên had finished his examination of the Lady of the Vase they went back again to the great hall and sat down. "I want you to tell me the truth," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What do you think of the case?"

"The lady did not take sufficient care after the birth of her child," Dr Jên said. "Now her blood is impoverished and her face is pale. She has no appetite and she does not care to move about. Her pulse beats strongly enough but it is not steady. That is a symptom that her liver is inflamed and that her blood circulates irregularly. Without the most careful attention, I fear she will not get well."

"What medicine are you thinking of giving her?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked.

"The first thing to do is to break down the fever and stop the flow of blood. I shall use yellow cedar and *Chih Mu* as the base and a few other things. I think she will be all right."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Shu T'ung to seal a tael of silver and give it to the doctor for the medicine. The doctor left, and shortly afterwards the medicine arrived. It was made ready in the rooms of the Lady of the Vase. Hsi-mên returned to Ying Po-chüeh.

"Li and Huang came to me this morning," Po-chüeh said. "They say they must have the money and asked me to plead with you to help them."

"I suppose I must do what you wish," Hsi-mên said. "Tell them to come to-morrow." He went with Ying Po-chüeh to another room and they had something to eat.

"Is Cassia still here?" Po-chüeh asked. "It seems to me that the man who went to the Eastern Capital should be back by now."

"Yes," Hsi-mên said, "I want him myself. I am anxious to send him to Yang-chou. I don't see how he can be much longer."

After the meal, Ying Po-chüeh went away.

The next day when Hsi-mên Ch'ing returned from the

office. Ying Po-chüeh was already waiting for him with Li and Huang. When he came in they rose. Hsi-mên went to change his clothes. He asked the Moon Lady for the two hundred and fifty taels that Hsü had paid. He added another two hundred and fifty taels and told Ch'ên Ching-chi to give the money to Li and Huang. "I am really very short of money," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told them, "and I am only giving you this because Brother Ying has pressed me to do so. I must have it back as soon as possible."

"You have been so kind to us," Li said, "that, of course, we shall not be slow to pay. As soon as we recover the money, we will bring it to you before we touch a penny ourselves." They checked the silver, thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing repeatedly, and withdrew.

Ying Po-chüeh was going too, but Hsi-mên pressed him to stay. While they were talking, P'ing An came and said: "Lai Pao has come back from the Eastern Capital."

"There," Po-chüeh said, "didn't I tell you yesterday that he was due back?"

Lai Pao came in and kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "Did you see Uncle Chai? What happened about this business of Cassia's?" Hsi-mên asked him.

"I saw Uncle Chai himself," Lai Pao said. "As soon as he had read your letter he sent a man to the Minister. I went with the man and the Minister told me that he would have had all the prisoners released, seeing that we came from his Eminence's palace, but, unfortunately, the matter had been taken up by Grand-Marshal Huang, and all he could do was to prevent any further pursuit of those who had escaped. He said he must keep in gaol those who had already been taken. But eunuchs, he said, never carry things to a conclusion and, before long, the Grand-Marshal will have forgotten all about the matter. Then it will be easy to settle the matter of the prisoners."

"In that case, Exquisite will not be arrested," Po-chüeh said. "The little strumpet is in luck's way."

"Uncle Chu and the others will probably receive some slight punishment," Lai Pao said, "but I don't think they will be sentenced." He took Chai's letter from his pocket and gave it to his master.

"Old Sun and Pock-marked Chu can never have dreamed that I would come to their rescue," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"But you have such a kind heart, Brother," said Po-chüeh.

"Uncle Chai seemed very pleased to see me," Lai Pao continued. "He asked whether you were going to the Capital to congratulate the Imperial Tutor on his birthday. I did not dare to say you were not going, so I said very probably you were. Uncle Chai said it would be very nice of you to go and see him."

"I never had any idea of going," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but, after what you have said, I shall have to go." Then he said: "You must be tired. Go to the inner court for some refreshment and then rest. I shall want you to go to Yang-chou in a day or two."

Lai Pao went out. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to tell Cassia. He said to Po-chüeh: "You stay here. I shall be back in a moment." But Po-chüeh was anxious to go after Li and Huang. He said: "I must go now but I will come back." He went away.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing came to the Moon Lady's room Cassia had already heard the news. She hastened to kowtow to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and the Moon Lady. "Father and Mother," she said, "it is only by your kindness that I have been rescued from desperate straits. I don't know what I can do for you in return."

"Since you came to us," the Moon Lady said, "we could do no less than get things put right for you. If we had not done our best there would have been no point in your coming."

"Father and Mother," Cassia said, "you have saved my life, but that little whore Exquisite had no claim on you, and you have saved her too. She made a lot of money; she involved me in her own trouble, and we have treated her well. I can't help feeling she is in our debt."

"Yes, indeed," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing, "the little whore has come out of it very well."

They talked for a while, then Cassia prepared to go away. "My mother has not heard the news," she said. "I must go and tell her or she will go on worrying. I will come again with her to thank you."

"Very well," Hsi-mên said. "I will not keep you. Go home and tell your mother."

"You must have something to eat before you go," the Moon Lady said. Cassia declined. Again she thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing, the Moon Lady, and the others.

"You are safe now," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told her, "but see that in future you have nothing to do with that young man Wang."

"Father," Cassia said, "what are you talking about! How could I even let him touch me! Why! if I meet him in the street I shall be done for. It was not I who asked him to come the other day."

"That is all right," the Moon Lady said. "Only don't see him any more. There is no need to be so positive about it." They sent for the sedan-chair and saw the girl off.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the Moon Lady he was thinking of going to the Eastern Capital.

"If you make up your mind to go," said the Moon Lady, "we must begin to get things ready at once, or you will be rushed."

"I have already got ready the things for the Imperial Tutor's birthday, the dragon gong, the embroidered stuffs, and the golden flowers," Hsi-mên said. "Only my personal baggage is not ready yet."

"Oh, your things will be no trouble," the Moon Lady told him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to see the Lady of the Vase.

The next day Hsi-mên was sitting in the arbour. He told Ch'ên Ching-chi to write a letter to Censor Ts'ai. This was the letter for Lai Pao to take. He gave Lai Pao some money and told him to start for Yang-chou the following morning.

Several days passed. The Imperial Tutor's birthday was drawing near. Hsi-mên Ch'ing picked out an auspicious day and told Ch'in T'ung, Tai An, Shu T'ung and Hua T'ung that they were to accompany him. They were to get their things ready. The Moon Lady, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, and the others packed Hsi-mên's clothes and the things he needed for the journey. With the presents there were more than twenty loads. On the eve of his departure the ladies gave a feast in honour of their husband, and afterwards he went to the Moon Lady's room to sleep with her.

The next day he sent off in advance the loads and his baggage and procured a passport so that his things might be cleared through all the stages on the way. When he had attended to these details he went to see the Lady of the Vase and his little son Kuan Ko.

"Take care of yourself," he said to the Lady of the Vase. "Whenever you need any medicine, just send somebody to Doctor Jên. I shall be back before long."

The Lady of the Vase said good-bye to him with tears in her eyes. "Be careful on the way," she said to him. Then she went with him to the great hall where the Moon Lady, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, and the others were waiting. All together they escorted him to the gate. Hsi-mên got into a light sedan-chair and, with the four boys on horseback, set out for the Eastern Capital. Every day they rose early to continue their journey and every night they rested at an inn or post-stage. The scenery was delightful. The travellers they met were mostly civil and military officers going with their presents to the Capital to congratulate the Imperial Tutor on his birthday.

In ten days they reached the Capital. They entered by the Gate of Ten Thousand Blessings, and, as it was late, they went straight to the Arch of Dragon Virtue to see Chai.

When the Comptroller heard that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had come he hurried out to welcome him. They greeted one another and tea was served. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Tai An to have the baggage brought in, but Chai bade his own servants attend to it. A banquet was served in honour of Hsi-mên's arrival. A table of carved horn was set and there were some very rare dishes. It would have been perfection if only there had been dragons' livers and phoenix marrow. Even the Imperial Tutor himself could not have done better. The servants brought wine. Chai offered a cup to Heaven, then to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên offered a cup in return. Fruits and dishes followed one another like water flowing in a stream.

After drinking two cups of wine, Hsi-mên Ch'ing said: "I have come specially to celebrate his Eminence's birthday and have brought with me a few trifling gifts for him. But I am afraid he may refuse them, and, to be candid, I should like

you to go to him and speak to him about me. Besides, I hope that his Eminence may take me under his guardianship. If he will do this, I shall be happy all the rest of my life. But it may be difficult to persuade him."

"There will be no difficulty," said Chai. "Though his Eminence is the most powerful of his Majesty's subjects, he is somewhat susceptible to praise and flattery. Let him but see the value of the presents you have brought him, and not only will he accept you as his ward; he will see that you get promotion."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted to hear this. They went on drinking and, after some time, Hsi-mên said he had drunk enough. Chai pressed him to drink one more cup, but Hsi-mên said he had serious business to attend to on the morrow and he dared not drink too much. But, being pressed, he did drink one cup more.

Chai saw that the boys were served with refreshments and invited Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go and rest in a study in the inner court. A bed with silken curtains and bed-clothes, exquisitely perfumed, had been made ready and there were many servants to wait upon him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing lay down alone upon the bed. This was something to which he was not accustomed and he found it hard to pass the night. Before dawn he was anxious to get up, but all the doors were shut and he had to wait till sunrise. Then a man came with a key and opened the doors; boys came with water and towels, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing dressed. Chai came in and sat with him. A servant brought a red box in which were thirty different kinds of delicacies and a silver wine-pot. The wine was poured and they ate their breakfast.

"After breakfast," the Comptroller said, "I will go before you to the palace and speak to his Eminence about you. I will let you know when to send the presents."

Hsi-mên thanked him. They took a few cups of wine with their breakfast and the table was cleared. "Sit here," Chai said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "I must go, but I shall be back very soon." It was indeed only a short time before he was back again. "When I got to the palace," he said, "his Eminence was washing. There was a host of civil and military officers waiting to congratulate him on his birthday, but not one of

them had seen him yet. I spoke of you to him and you must go at once. There is a crowd at the palace. I will go first and you can join me there." He went away again.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted. He ordered his own servants and asked some of Chai's servants to carry the presents to the palace. Dressed in ceremonial robes and hat, he got into his sedan-chair. A host of officials, great and small, all come to congratulate the Prime Minister, were pressing shoulder to shoulder and back to back. In the distance Hsi-mên Ch'ing saw one officer, also sitting in a sedan-chair, near the Arch of Dragon Virtue. When he looked more closely he recognised his old friend Miao of Yang-chou. At the same time Miao recognised him. They got down from their sedan-chairs, bowed, and saluted one another. Miao was a rich man and now held a very comfortable position. He had attached himself to the Imperial Tutor's faction, and had come, like the rest, to congratulate his Eminence on his birthday. So they chanced to meet. They were both eager to get on to the palace and did little more than greet one another, exchange addresses, and then separate. Hsi-mên Ch'ing came to the palace, bowed, and entered through the Great Archway. There Chai met him.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing noticed that the middle gate was shut and that the officers were all coming in by the gates at the side. He asked Chai the meaning of this and was told that the Emperor had once passed through that door and, ever after, it must be closed to ordinary men. Hsi-mên Ch'ing followed the Comptroller through one door after another. Each was guarded by a military officer. There was excellent order everywhere. The military officers bowed to Chai and asked who Hsi-mên Ch'ing was. Chai told them that Hsi-mên was his relative from Shan-tung, come to congratulate his Eminence. They went through more doors and down more passages. Everywhere were carved pillars and painted beams. Music could be heard faintly. It seemed to come from heaven. "The palace is far distant from any other place," Hsi-mên said. "Where is the music coming from?"

"His Eminence," Chai said, "has commanded the attendance of twenty-four girl dancers. They know all such dances as the Dance of the Evil One, the Rainbow Skirt Dance and the Dance of Kuan Yin. They play every day when my

master, breakfasts, dines, and sups. At present he is taking his breakfast."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing smelled some incense that he had never smelled before, and the music seemed nearer. "Step softly," said Chai, "we are quite close to his Eminence's study."

They went through another passage and came to a great hall which seemed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing like the palace of the angels. Outside were storks and peacocks and many strange birds. There were the Hortensia flowers which confer Eternal Life, Flowers of the Sacred Cloud, and the *Fu-sang* Plant; flowers that never faded, blossoming so luxuriantly that the eye could scarce bear to dwell on them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not dare to press forward. He asked Chai to go before him. †

They went into the hall. In the midst of it stood a great throne with a tiger skin thrown over it, and, on the throne, sat a man robed in a gown with dragons embroidered upon it. This was his Eminence the Imperial Tutor. Behind a screen were twenty or thirty exquisite maidens in a row, all dressed after the fashion of the court. Some held kerchiefs and some held fans with which to refresh his Eminence. The Comptroller stood beside him and Hsi-mên Ch'ing kotowed four times. His Eminence rose and, standing upon a rug, returned the salutation. It was the first time they met.

The Comptroller approached the Imperial Tutor and whispered. Hsi-mên Ch'ing knew that he was being spoken about, and again kotowed four times. Now the Imperial Tutor did not rise. It was a sign that he was prepared to accept Hsi-mên as his ward. Then Hsi-mên spoke and called him 'Father'.

"Your son," he said, "has nothing to offer. I have brought no more than a few trifles in honour of your most illustrious birthday. It is as though one brought a feather for ten thousand *li*. But may your Eminence live as long as the Mountains of the South!"

"You are very kind," the Imperial Tutor said. "Please sit down."

An attendant gave Hsi-mên Ch'ing a chair. He bowed twice and sat down. Tea was brought. Chai went out and ordered the presents to be brought in. There were more than

twenty loads. They were brought and laid before the steps. A small box was opened and the inventory taken from it. It said: One crimson dragon robe; one green dragon robe; twenty rolls of Han-figured satin; twenty rolls of Ssü-ch'uan silk; twenty rolls of foreign cloth; other rolls, forty, both plain and figured; a girdle of a lion's head in jade; another girdle mounted in gold of tagaraka wood; of jade goblets and horn goblets, each ten pairs; four pairs of golden wine-cups with flowers for decoration; ten fine pearls and two hundred taels of gold. These were the present.

The Imperial Tutor looked at the inventory and then at the twenty loads of offerings. He was pleased and thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then he told Chai to have them sent to the treasury and called for wine to entertain Hsi-mên Ch'ing. But Hsi-mên remarked that his Eminence was very busy. He rose and prepared to take his leave. "Very well," said the Imperial Tutor, "but come this afternoon." Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed and went out, the Imperial Tutor taking a few steps with him. Chai went farther, but he too was busy and had to return, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back alone to the house. There he took off his hat and girdle and had dinner. After dinner, he went to the study and slept for a while. Then a man came and asked him to go and see the Imperial Tutor. Hsi-mên gave the man some gold and put on his robes. He told Tai An to make up a number of parcels of silver and put them into a box. The four boys followed him as he made his way again in a sedan-chair to the Imperial Tutor's palace.

His Eminence sent invitations to all who came to congratulate him upon his birthday, but these invitations were spread out over a period of three days. The first day was reserved for members of the Royal Household and the eunuchs, the second for ministers and officials of high rank, and the third for the commoner class of officers. But Hsi-mên Ch'ing was a stranger and had offered so magnificent a present that his Eminence was pleased with him and gave him a special invitation. He even came to receive his guest. Hsi-mên very politely begged the Imperial Tutor to go before him. He bent his back and walked delicately.

"It has been very kind of you to come such a long way specially on my account, and to give me such a splendid

present," his Eminence said. "I trust you will take a meal with me that I may at least show my inclination for you."

"My life in this world," Hsi-mên said, "is entirely dependent upon your Eminence's kindness. The trifles I brought are not worth mentioning."

They chatted and joked together as though they really were father and son. The twenty-four beautiful maidens played for them and attendants brought wine. His Eminence desired to offer Hsi-mên a cup of wine. Hsi-mên expressed his unworthiness, but, being pressed, rose and drank a single cup. They sat down. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing bade Shu T'ung bring a peach-shaped cup of gold. He filled it to the brim and, taking it, knelt down before his Eminence and said: "Live for a thousand years." The Imperial Tutor smiled.

"Stand up, my son," he said. He drank the wine.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing rose and took his place again. The food served was so rare and varied that it can hardly be described. Hsi-mên Ch'ing stayed until sunset. Then he distributed the packets of silver among the attendants and took his leave of the Imperial Tutor. "Father," he said, "you have much to do and I must not detain you. I shall not trouble you again." Then he left the palace and returned to Chai's house.

The next day he decided to visit Master Miao and told Tai An to find out where he was staying. Tai An discovered that he was at a house outside the Imperial City belonging to a eunuch named Li. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went there with Tai An. The boy presented Hsi-mên's card and Master Miao came out. "I was hoping that some good friend would come and have a chat with me," he said. "You have come at the right moment." He insisted that Hsi-mên should stay for dinner. There was a magnificent spread of food of every kind. Two very handsome singing-boys came and sang several songs.

"These two foolish boys," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, pointing to Tai An and Ch'in T'ung, "can only eat and drink. They cannot compare with your two boys."

Miao smiled. "I'm afraid they will not be of much use to you, but, if you really like them, I shall be only too glad to give them to you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing said: "I dare not accept anything which you must appreciate so much yourself." They did not stop

drinking till very late. Then Hsi-mên said good-bye to Miao and returned to Chai's house.

For eight or nine days, nearly all the important officials at the palace sent invitations to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then he felt anxious to get home and ordered Tai An to pack up his baggage. The Comptroller pressed him to stay one day more. This he did. The two men drank together and treated one another as though they were blood relations. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing set off on his way back to Shan-tung.

While Hsi-mên Ch'ing was away, the Moon Lady and the others stayed in their own rooms doing needlework and none of them went out to play. So they waited for his return, all except Golden Lotus, who dressed herself exquisitely and mingled with the maids, sometimes playing at guessing fingers and sometimes at dominoes. She laughed and talked merrily, not caring what anybody thought about her. She was anxious to meet Ch'ên Ching-chi, and every day went to the garden and many times to the cavern, hoping to find him there. Ching-chi was always thinking about her and he went there frequently. Whenever they met they would play and kiss. But they were afraid of someone seeing them and dared not fully satisfy their longing for each other.

One day the Moon Lady, Tower of Jade, and the Lady of the Vase were sitting together when, suddenly, Tai An came in and kotowed. "Father is nearly here," he told them.

"Where is he now?" the Moon Lady asked.

"I came first with the passports," Tai An said. "He must still be twenty *li* away."

"Have you had anything to eat?" the Moon Lady asked.

"I have had breakfast but not lunch."

The Moon Lady ordered food to be prepared, then she, with the other ladies, went to the great hall to await her husband. They waited a long time.

At last Hsi-mên Ch'ing arrived. The ladies went out to welcome him. He made a reverence to the Moon Lady, then greeted all the others. Shu T'ung, Ch'in T'ung and Hua T'ung kotowed and went to the kitchen for something to eat. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the ladies about the hardships of his journey, how he had stayed with Chai, how the Imperial Tutor had invited him, and how he had gone to many parties ~~with~~

the eunuchs and other officials. Then he asked the Lady of the Vase about his baby. "And how do you feel," he said, "after taking Doctor Jên's medicine? Was it any good? Though my body went to the Eastern Capital, my heart was always here with you."

"The baby is well and I am better than I was," the Lady of the Vase assured him.

The Moon Lady saw that all the luggage was brought in and the presents that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been given. She gave orders for a meal to be made ready for her husband.

That night the ladies gave a feast to celebrate his return. He went to the Moon Lady's room to sleep, and it seemed to them like a refreshing rain after a long period of drought, or the meeting of old friends in a strange land. They took extreme delight in one another.

The next day, Ch'ên Ching-chi and his wife came to pay their respects to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and discussed business matters. Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh heard that Hsi-mên had returned and they came to call. Hsi-mên greeted them. "So long a journey must have been very trying," they said. Hsi-mên told them about the beauty and greatness of the Eastern Capital and how the Imperial Tutor had accepted him as a ward. They congratulated him. Hsi-mên asked them to stay and have some wine.

When Ch'ang Chih-chieh was about to leave he said to his host: "There is something I should like to ask you, but I don't know whether I should or not." He bent his head and seemed embarrassed.

"Please tell me what it is," Hsi-mên said.

"Well," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said, "my house is not so convenient as it might be. I should like to find another but I have no money. Perhaps you will lend me some and let me pay you back with interest."

"Why talk about interest?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "We are too good friends for that. But, at the moment, I simply haven't any ready money. You must wait till Han comes back and I will certainly do what you wish." Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh thanked him and went away.

Master Miao had promised to give two singing-boys to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. But Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been so anxious

to get home that he did not stay to say good-bye to Miao. Miao thought he was still at the Capital and sent his servants to Chai's place to make enquiries. So he learned that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had gone. "A gentleman's word," he thought, "is like a whip on a mettlesome horse, I must do what I promised." He sent for the two singing-boys and said to them: "I promised to give you to his Lordship Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and now I am going to send you to his place. You must pack your things."

The two boys knelt down. "We have been with you many years," they said. "You have done much for us and taught us to sing. Now you don't want us any longer: you are going to send us away." They wept.

Miao himself was not at all happy about it. "Don't think I wish to get rid of you," he said, "but a man must keep his word. We must observe the teaching of Confucius. He says: A man who does not keep his word is a man no longer. There is no help for it. We cannot disobey these precepts and I must not take your point of view into account. I am going to write a letter and send you to him. I will ask him to treat you kindly."

The two boys could only submit. They stood up. Miao told his family tutor to write a letter for them to take to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He also wrote a card to go with a present of silk, books and handkerchiefs. Then he ordered his servant Miao Shih to take the letter and the two boys to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. The boys said good-bye to their old master, shed many tears, then mounted their horses and set off for Shan-tung. When they reached Ch'ing Ho district they dismounted and inquired where Hsi-mên lived. Then they went to the house.

After Hsi-mên's return from the Eastern Capital he was very busy. Many people sent him presents and many sent him invitations. Every day three or four friends came to see him, and he could not even attend to his duties at the office. But this day things were easier and he had gone to the office. He went to the Great Hall and, with Magistrate Hsia, examined some of the prisoners. After this, he got into his sedan-chair and, with several policemen to clear his way, went home. When he reached home, Miao Shih and the two boys had been waiting for some time. They followed him into the hall. Miao Shih knelt down.

"I come from Master Miao of Yang-chou," he said. "This is his letter." He took out the letter and the list of presents.

"Please stand up," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to him. He opened the letter and read it carefully, pleased that Master Miao had sent him the two boys. "It was quite by chance I met your master," he said. "We were very friendly and when we were drinking together he was good enough to promise me you two boys. Now he has sent you to me even all this long way. Your master is certainly a man whose words are worth a thousand gold pieces. It is most unusual."

The two boys came forward and kotowed. "Our master bade us come and serve you," they said. "He asks that you will be kind to us."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told them to rise. "I will see that you are given a worthy task," he said. He called for food and wine to be given them and Miao Shih, prepared some valuable presents for Master Miao, and had a letter written to accompany them. He told the two boys that they should serve him in his study.

Han Tao-kuo's wife, Porphyry, knew that Hsi-mên was very busy and was anxious to find someone to take a message to him. Her young brother, Wang Ching, was a fine-looking lad about sixteen years old and, that same day, she decided to send him to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên accepted him and sent him to work in his study.

While Hsi-mên Ch'ing was making arrangements about these boys, Ying Po-chüeh came to see him. Hsi-mên told him how Master Miao had sent the two boys. He told Tai An to bring refreshments and invite Po-chüeh to dine. Then he asked the boys to sing some songs of the south. They came in and stood side by side with castanets in their hands. They sang: 'Last night the plums in the garden blossomed.' Their voices were sweet and the melody they sang was exquisite. Po-chüeh was delighted. He jumped out of his chair. "Brother," he said, "what extraordinary luck to get two boys like this. It was indeed kind of Master Miao."

"I shall have to give him something in return," Hsi-mên

Ch'ing said. He gave the two boys new names. One he called Ch'un Hung and the other Ch'un Yen. He told them to sing two or three short songs. The two men drank their wine after a while, and Ying Po-chüeh went away.

CH'ANG CHIH-CHIEH BUYS A NEW HOUSE

HSI-MÊN CH'ING kept the two boys. He gave a letter of thanks to Miao Shih to take to his master with some presents, and some silver to Miao Shih himself. Then Miao Shih went home. Not long afterwards Ch'un Yen died, and Ch'un Hung was left alone.

Though Ch'ang Chih-chieh had asked for Hsi-mên Ch'ing's help, the days passed and he was still without money. His landlord pressed him continually. Unfortunately for him, Hsi-mên Ch'ing, after coming back from the Eastern Capital, was kept busy going to one party after another. Ch'ang Chih-chieh could not get hold of him. The proverb says: If friends meet, they cannot fail to help each other; but, when they do not meet, nothing is done. Ch'ang Chih-chieh asked Ying Po-chüeh to go to Hsi-mên for him. Hsi-mên was not at home. Ch'ang Chih-chieh went mournfully home and his wife told him what she thought about him. "You call yourself a man," she said, "yet you can't get a house fit to live in, and here we are in utter misery. You have always bragged about your friendship with Master Hsi-mên, but it doesn't look as though he would do much for you."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh had a mouth but, after this, he dared not open it. He seemed dazed and did not utter a single word. The next day he got up very early in the morning and went to see Ying Po-chüeh. He took him to a wine-house and invited him to drink. "I do not wish to cause you any expense," Ying Po-chüeh said, but Ch'ang Chih-chieh pushed him into a chair. He ordered wine, a plate of smoked meat and another of fish. When they had drunk a few cups, Ch'ang Chih-chieh said:

"I have bothered you several times to speak to his Lordship about my affairs, but, so far, we have not been able to see him and this business of my house is getting desperate. Last night my wife kept at me all night about it. I could not bear it. That is why I am up so early this morning. Now, Brother, won't you go to his Lordship again? I don't suppose he has gone out yet."

"Since you ask me," Po-chüeh said, "I will certainly go, and I have no doubt we shall manage it to-day."

They drank more wine, then Ying Po-chüeh said he must not drink too much so early in the day. Ch'ang Chih-chieh pressed him to drink still one more cup, then he paid for the wine and they came out together and went to Hsi-mên's house.

It was the beginning of autumn and a pleasant wind was blowing from the west. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been going to one party after another and was beginning to feel the strain. This day he had been invited by Eunuch Chou but he excused himself and did not go. Instead, he went to the garden with the Moon Lady, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, and the Lady of the Vase. They enjoyed the flowers and were all very happy together.

Ch'ang Chih-chieh and Ying Po-chüeh were delighted to find Hsi-mên at home. They went to the hall and sat there for a long time but there was no sign of Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Shu T'ung and Hua T'ung came in with a large chest filled with silken clothes. As they passed, they shouted: "We've been carrying these things half a day and we're nowhere near finished yet." Po-chüeh asked them where Hsi-mên Ch'ing was.

"He is amusing himself in the garden," Shu T'ung said.

"Then may I trouble you to tell him we are here?"

The two boys went on with their chest. After a while Shu T'ung came out again and said: "Father says, will you wait a moment and he will be with you." They waited and, at last, Hsi-mên came to them. They bowed to him and sat down.

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "you have been drinking much wine these last few days and you must be very busy. What are you doing at home to-day?"

"Since I saw you last," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I have had invitations every day. I have been drinking too much and I'm tired of it. To-day I ought to have gone to another party but I made some excuse for not going."

"I have just seen a chest full of clothes," Po-chüeh said. "Where have they come from?"

"It is nearly autumn," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "and we must

have autumn clothes, you know. Those you saw are my first wife's, but that was only half of them. We haven't finished them all yet."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh put out his tongue. "With six wives you must have to have six chests. What a nuisance! We poor people find it bad enough even to get a roll of cloth. You must be a rich man, Brother." Ying Po-chüeh and Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed.

"How is it that the things from Yang-chou have not arrived yet?" Po-chüeh said. "We know nothing of the way business has been going or whether Li and Huang have let you have their money yet."

"Perhaps the boat is delayed," Hsi-mên said, "I have not heard a word and I am rather worried. Li and Huang have told me that they will not get their money till next month."

Po-chüeh drew nearer to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "You may remember," he said, "that the other day Brother Ch'ang asked your help. The last few days you have been very busy and we have not had an opportunity of mentioning the matter to you. Brother Ch'ang's landlord is being very harsh, his wife grumbles every day, and he is at his wits' end. The weather is getting colder and colder and his fur coat is still in the pawnshop. Brother, you must show your kindness to him. You can't have forgotten the proverb: If we would help a man, let it be when he most needs help. If you help him so that his wife ceases to nag at him and he can find a house to live in, all the more credit to you. Brother Ch'ang has asked me to come and beg you to help him at once."

"I certainly did promise to help him," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but I spent a great deal of money on my visit to the Eastern Capital and I shall have to wait until Han comes back. Why is Brother Ch'ang in such a hurry?"

"It isn't Brother Ch'ang: it's his wife. She is the one who grumbles. You must do something for him without delay."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing thought for a while. Then he said: "Well, perhaps I may just be able to manage it. How many rooms will they need?"

"They are only husband and wife," Po-chüeh said. "They will need an outer room, a reception-room, a bedroom and a kitchen. They can't do with less than four rooms. They must

have three or four pieces of silver. Brother, do this for them. Help them to get a house at once."

"I can only let him have a few taels to-day," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "With them he can buy clothes and furniture. When he has got his house, he shall have some more."

Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh stood up together and thanked him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Shu T'ung: "Go and ask the Great Lady to give you the silver that I have in a leather case." The boy went away and soon returned with the silver. "This is the money—about ten taels, I think—which I had at the Eastern Capital to give to the servants at his Eminence's Palace," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Take it and buy a few things with it." He opened one of the packets and showed it to Ch'ang Chih-chieh. "The silver is in packets of three or five ch'ien," he said.

Ch'ang Chih-chieh took them and put them in his pocket. He thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"Don't think I have deliberately kept you waiting," Hsi-mên said. "But you hadn't fixed upon your house and I hadn't the money. When I do get some you shall have more."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh thanked him. They all sat down again.

"I have heard of men of past generations who were generous and open-handed," Po-chüeh said. "The consequence was that their sons and grandsons were an honour to their family, and improved and extended their patrimony. On the other hand, I have heard of others, mean men who hoarded away their gold and treasure, whose sons and grandsons were anything but desirable. Sometimes they failed to preserve even the tombs of their ancestors. The justice of Heaven is unfailing."

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "money should be made to circulate. It ought not to be buried away in one place. It is given us to use. If one man keeps a huge store of it for himself, someone else must go short. It is a crime to hoard away money and treasure."

Shu T'ung brought food for them and the three men ate it. Ch'ang Chih-chieh stood up, the money in his pocket, and went away in great delight. When he got home, his wife came out shouting and scolding as usual. "Now you barren fig-tree! you impecunious rascal!" she cried. "Would you go away and leave your wife to starve? You seem quite pleased

with yourself but you ought to be ashamed. Here we are with no house to live in and the landlord always badgering us. I suppose you think I like to hear the sort of thing he says."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh did not open his mouth. He waited until his wife had finished, then quietly took the silver from his pocket and put it on the table. He opened the packet. "Hullo, my square-holed brother, my dear square-holed brother! How bright and good you look! You make my body tingle all over. What a pity I can't swallow you down with a drop of water. If only you'd come to me earlier, that whore would not have been so rude to me."

His wife saw him set down twelve or thirteen taels of silver. She dashed to the table and tried to grab them.

"Ah," said Ch'ang, "you have been nagging at me all this time, yet, the moment you set eyes on the silver, you seem to have become quite friendly. To-morrow I am going to buy some clothes and get a place to live by myself. I'm tired of putting up with your tricks."

Mistress Ch'ang smiled sweetly at him. "Brother," she said, "where did you get this silver?"

But Ch'ang had nothing to say to her.

"Are you angry with me, Brother? I only want us to get a home. Now the money is here we must talk the matter over. We will buy a house and settle down. Why are you so angry? I have been a good wife to you. If you are angry with me, you are unjust."

Ch'ang did not speak.

The woman continued, but he paid not the slightest attention. She began to feel abashed and started to cry. Ch'ang sighed.

"You woman," he said, "you do no work in the fields. You do not weave. All you do is nag at me."

Mistress Ch'ang shed more tears. Then they both shut their mouths tight and sat there silently, for there was no one to make peace between them. But Ch'ang began to reflect. "The woman," he said to himself, "is in a very difficult position. Perhaps I ought not to be angry with her even if she does grumble about everything. It seems hardly kind not to speak to her. If Hsi-mên Ch'ing got to know about it, he would undoubtedly say that I am to blame." He smiled and

said to his wife: "I am joking with you. I am not angry really. But you so often talk to me in this horrible strain, and I have never complained. I have just gone out of your way. Now I'll tell you all about this money. This morning you were so cantankerous that I could stand it no longer. I went to Brother Ying, gave him a drink and then we went to see his Lordship. By a stroke of luck his Lordship happened to be at home. He had not gone to a party. Brother Ying was most kind. He did his utmost with his Lordship, and I got this money. He has promised that, when we find a house, he will give me some more. These twelve taels are for expenses and buying the things we need immediately."

"Now that you have this money," his wife said, "we must take care not to waste it. First of all, we must buy some winter clothes so that we shan't freeze."

"Yes," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said, "I was just going to suggest that. Here are twelve taels. We can buy a few clothes and some furniture. When we get the new house and are ready to move in, we shall look more respectable. I don't know how to express my appreciation of his Lordship's kindness. We shall certainly have to send him an invitation when we get into our new house."

"We will see about that later," said his wife.

The woman asked him if he had had anything to eat. "Yes," Ch'ang Chih-chieh said, "I had something with his Lordship. But, doubtless, you have not. I will take some money and go and buy you some rice."

"Be careful you don't lose it and please come straight back."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh took a basket and went down the street. He bought mutton at the butcher's and rice at the rice shop. He took them home. His wife came to the door to meet him.

"Why did you buy this piece of mutton?" she said.

"You said you had a hard life, and, really, I ought to have killed an ox or two for you. This is but a trifling piece of meat."

Mistress Ch'ang shook her finger at him. "You hard-hearted thief. You still hate me. But I don't believe there is anything you can do about it."

"Probably," said Ch'ang, "I shan't forgive you though you call me 'Brother' and 'Darling' and ask for forgiveness a thousand times. I will show my authority."

The woman laughed and went to the well to draw some water. Then she cooked the food, set a piece of mutton on the table and asked him to have some. "I have just had something," he said. "Eat it all yourself." The woman ate the food alone. She cleared the table and told him to go and buy some clothes. Ch'ang Chih-chieh took some silver and went down the street. He went to several shops before he found what he wanted. He bought a black silk gown for his wife, a green silk skirt, a blue jacket and a white silk skirt, five pieces in all. For himself he bought a goose-yellow coat and a clove-coloured gown. All this, with a few other things, cost him five taels and six ch'ien.

"The things are not a bargain, but they are worth the money," his wife said. She put the clothes into a chest and decided to go and buy furniture the next day. She was thoroughly delighted and all her grumblings vanished in the Eastern Ocean.

When Ch'ang Chih-chieh had gone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh still sat in the great hall. "Though I am only a military officer," Hsi-mên said, "I have a fairly important position. I have made a number of friends in the Capital and I am in close relation with the Imperial Tutor. Letters pour in upon me like a stream. I am too busy to attend to my own correspondence and I must find a scholar who can save me the trouble. Unfortunately I don't know any genuinely learned man. If you do, please say so."

"You have set me a very difficult problem," Po-chüeh said. "We want a learned man, but he must be honest. He must be a man easy to get on with yet one who does not talk too much. We must have someone who can keep his own counsel. And we don't want a man who is a profound scholar in deceit and cunning and a fool at everything else. I have a friend who is a graduate. He has, it is true, several times failed to pass the final examination, but he is a learned man and will stand comparison with P'an and Ssü-ma.¹ He is a follower of Confucius. He and I have been good friends for ages. So far as I remember, ten years ago he went in for the examination and the examiners spoke very highly of his work. Unfortun-

¹ P'an Ku and Ssü-ma Ch'ien.

ately, another man was slightly better than he was, and he failed. He has made several other attempts since then and he still reads though his hair is grey now. He owns about a hundred acres of land and three or four houses."

"If he is in comfortable circumstances, why should he take a job?" Hsi-mên said.

"His land and his houses have been bought by wealthy families and now his two hands are his only capital."

"Why did you tell me he had land if he has sold it?"

"Well, if that doesn't appeal to you, perhaps this will. He has a pretty young wife about twenty years old, an excellent woman. She has two three-year-old babies."

"If he has a beautiful wife, he certainly won't come," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Fortunately, about a couple of years ago, his wife ran off to the Eastern Capital with another man. The two babies died of smallpox, so he is all alone in the world. I'm sure he will come."

"You are talking rubbish," Hsi-mên said, laughing. "What is his name?"

"He is called Shui. His learning is incomparable. If you engage him, I guarantee your letters will be a source of pride to you. He is a very learned man indeed."

"I don't believe a word you say," Hsi-mên said. "It is all a pack of lies. If you can remember anything he has written, tell me, and, if I think it is any good, I'll engage him and provide him with quarters. Since he is a single man there will be no difficulty about that."

"I remember getting a letter from him asking me to help him to find a job," Po-chüeh said. "I will tell you what I can remember of it."

A letter this for Brother Ying.
I think of you, but cannot find
Words to express my feelings.
All here are well.
If you should hear of a job for a tutor
Pray get it for me.
I may flatter myself, but it seems to me
My brush is as great as a beam.
I do not write often, but when I do
Look out for clouds and mist.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing roared with laughter. "If he wanted you to get him a job, why didn't he write a letter instead of sending you doggerel like that? Horrible doggerel too! I'm sure the fellow is both an ignoramus and a rogue."

"Oh, dear me, no," said Ying Po-chüeh. "You must not judge him by that. He and I have been friends for three generations. We used to go to school together when we were boys. I remember our teacher saying that Ying and Shui were one as clever as the other. 'They will turn out well,' he used to say. We did our exercises and our compositions together and never felt the least bit jealous. You see we are really good friends. We are never formal with one another. That's why he wrote me that little ditty. It's quite entertaining, isn't it?"

"Perhaps you can tell me what the fourth line means?" Hsi-mên said.

"Ah, Brother," said Po-chüeh, "don't you see? That is a very clever piece of character analysis. *Shê* on the left-hand side, *kuan* on the right, and you have the other *kuan*. He is saying to me, perfectly obviously: 'When you know of a *kuan*, recommend me for it.' Not a single unnecessary word. How could he write more plainly what he wants to say?"

Hsi-mên Ch'ing could think of no further objection to make. He said to Ying Po-chüeh: "What kind of man is he?"

"His behaviour is even more admirable than his scholarship," Po-chüeh said. "Two years ago he was tutor in the household of a certain Vice-President Li. There were a host of beautiful maids there and several good-looking boys. Master Shui was there for four or five years and an impure thought about them never entered his head. In course of time the maids and boys were so impressed by his wisdom that they all deliberately set to work to seduce him. Master Shui is a soft-hearted man and he yielded. His employer drove him out and the neighbours said he was a scamp. As a matter of fact, even if a girl sits on his knee, he remains perfectly calm. If you engage him, let your maids and your boys go to him and you'll find out soon enough how he behaves."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "You funny dog, you can never stop joking. The other day, my colleague Hsia's tutor, Master Ni, told me of a friend of his called Wên. When he has been to see me, we will decide."

Chapter Fifty-seven

HSI-MÊN CHING BECOMES A BENEFACTOR

The temple stands bare on the mountain side
There are shrines among the towering crags •
But the Buddhas of days gone by can be known no more.
Their stone bodies are covered with moss
The ancient sanctuary stands alone
The image of the world-honoured one is shrouded in dust,
As though he heard the mourning of the dragons and the
elephants
And the hearts of the faithful are filled with sadness.

If a general goes to war in vain
Let him give freely the four gifts and tarry not.
I know that the *T'o-lo* tree
Still grows beside the lotus blossom tower.
Thus will he bring joy to the gods
And the demon host will bear no grudge against him.

IN Tung-p'ing Fu of the province of Shan-tung there was a temple called the Temple of Eternal Felicity. It was built in the second year of the reign *P'u Tung* of the Emperor Wu Ti of the Liang dynasty. Its founder was a certain patriarch named Wan Hui. If you ask why the patriarch was so called, I must tell you that, when he was about seven or eight years old, his brother was sent to serve as a soldier in the marches. He did not write to his family and none knew whether he was alive or dead. So his old mother was unhappy about him and often shed tears. One day the younger boy said to his mother: "Mother, the world is at peace and our life is comfortable. What makes you weep so much? Tell me and I will share your grief."

"You are only a boy," his mother said, "and you do not know. When your father died your elder brother went to the marches. He was an officer in the army. For four or five years no word has come from him and I do not know whether he is alive or dead. How can I be happy?" She cried again.

"If I had known this before I would soon have put things

right. Mother, tell me where my brother is and I will go and find him and get a letter from him."

The old woman laughed before her tears had dried. "You foolish child!" she said, "if it were only a hundred *li* or so away, we could go. But he is in Manchuria and that is more than ten thousand *li* away. It would take a strong man five months to get there. You are only a boy and you would never get there at all."

"If he is in Manchuria," said the boy, "Manchuria is not in the skies. I will go, and you shall have me back in no time." He fastened his shoes, straightened his coat, bowed to his mother, and went off like a streak of smoke. The old woman called him back but he did not answer, and when she ran after him she could not catch him. She was more melancholy than ever. Many of her neighbours came to console her. "The boy cannot possibly go very far," they said. "He is sure to come back." The old woman dried her eyes and sat down sadly.

The sun was sinking in the west when the old lady went out to see if she could see anything of him. In the distance was a faint shadow which might have been a boy. She besought Heaven and Earth and the Three Glorious Ones and said: "May my little son return as a reward for my fastings and my sacrifices." And indeed, her son suddenly stood before her.

"What, Mother," he said, "have you not gone to bed yet? Here I am, back from Manchuria, and here is the letter from my brother."

The old woman laughed. "You did right not to go, but don't tell me any more lies. You couldn't possibly go more than a thousand *li* in one day."

"So you don't believe me, Mother?" the boy said. He took a packet from his sleeve. In it was a letter. It had indeed been written by his brother. And he brought a shirt to be washed which was one the old woman remembered making. Everybody heard of this and so the boy came to be called Wan Hui. Afterwards he became a monk and was known as Wan Hui the Venerable. He was a man of outstanding virtue and performed a number of striking miracles. Once he swallowed two pints of needles before the stone tiger of the Emperor Chao, and once he brought three pagodas from his head before the heir apparent of the Emperor Wu Ti of Liang. So the Temple of

Eternal Felicity was built expressly for him and immense amounts of money were spent on its construction.

Years and months flew like a weaver's shuttles. The patriarch Wan Hui went back to Paradise, and, one after the other, his pious monks died. There were left but a handful of idle scroungers who kept women, drank wine, and did everything that is unbecoming. It was not long before they reached such a pitch that they pawned their religious habits and sold their bells. The tiles and bricks of which the temple was built were sold for wine, and the rain and wind soon affected the sacred images. A place of veneration became the prey of mists and weeds. For forty years nobody troubled to rebuild it. Then there came a monk from India who was impressed with the greatness of China. He crossed the River of Shifting Sands and the Sea of the Zodiac, and, after travelling eight or nine years, came at last to China. Then he came to Shan-tung and so to the ruined temple. There, for nine years he stayed with his face to the wall and did not speak a single word.

One day, an idea suddenly came into his head and he said to himself: "This temple is utterly in ruins, and these hairless asses care only for eating and drinking. It has become a waste place. This is a sad business. If I do not make up my mind to do something about it, no one else will. I must go out. I hear that his Lordship Hsi-mên, a military officer and a very rich man, one day when he was entertaining his Excellency Ts'ai here, saw the ruin and spoke of restoring this temple. If I can only persuade him to take the initiative everything will be plain sailing. I must go at once." He beat the gong, assembled all the monks in the Great Hall, and told them what his purpose was. He bade one of them bring him ink and a brush. Then he wrote an appeal for funds. This veritable Buddha of a monk then left his fellows, put on sandals and a straw hat, and went to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Now to return to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. When Ying Po-chüeh had left him he went to the Moon Lady's room and told his wife about Po-chüeh's recommendation of Master Shui. Then he said: "When I came back from the Eastern Capital my friends and relations all gave parties in my honour and we must do something in return. I am not particularly busy to-day

and I think we might do it at once." He told Tai An to see to the preparations, and sent the other boys round with invitations. Then he took the Moon Lady's hand and went to see Kuan Ko in the rooms of the Lady of the Vase.

The Sixth Lady welcomed them smilingly, and told the nurse to bring out the baby. He had grown very handsome. The child smiled at them and went readily to the Moon Lady. She took him in her arms. "My son," she said, "you are a clever boy and you will do well. When you are grown up you will be a good son to your mother."

"When he is grown up and gets a position the robes of ceremony will be yours," the Lady of the Vase said.

"My son," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "don't follow in your father's footsteps. When you are a man, be a civil officer, not a military officer like me. Mine is a good post but it has not the dignity of a civil officer's; and, though I am rich, I do not enjoy the respect that is paid to the others."

Golden Lotus was standing outside and heard all this. She was very angry. "You shameless, boasting, dirty strumpet!" she muttered. "Do you think you are the only woman who can bear a child? He hasn't passed three yellow plum seasons or four summers yet. He isn't through smallpox and his school-days are not over. He lives still with the God of Hades. What right have you to talk about his getting a government appointment and your being honoured as a lady? And that rascal has no shame. Why should the child get a civil position different from his own?"

While she was muttering angrily to herself, Tai An came. "Fifth Mother," he said, "where is Father?"

"You little thief!" Golden Lotus cried, "how do I know where your father is? Do you expect to find him in my room? Why not with the honoured lady to whom he pays so many delicate attentions? Why do you come and ask me?"

Tai An saw that there was no purpose in his questioning her any further, and went to the Lady of the Vase's room. There he coughed warningly and said: "Uncle Y'ing is in the great Hall."

"Why! He has only just gone," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What has brought him back so soon?"

"He will tell you when he sees you," the boy said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing left the Moon Lady and the Lady of the Vase and went to the outer court. He was just about to speak to Ying Po-chüeh when the old monk arrived. Outside the gate, he called loudly upon Buddha and asked: "Is this the noble Hsi-mên's house? Tell him, Master Comptroller, that I am here. Tell him that I will bless his son, send him prosperity and long life. I am a monk from the Eastern Capital come to ask for alms."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was a man who never troubled about money. He was delighted to have a son and was only too glad to do anything he could for the child. The servants knew this well and they came and told him without hesitation. "Bring him in," Hsi-mên said. The old monk came in and made reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"I come from India," he said. "I was at the Eastern Capital for a while, but for nine years I have remained in solemn meditation at the Temple of Eternal Felicity. I have come to know the Sacred Principle. Now the temple is in ruins and the rooms are falling down and it seemed right to me that, as a humble disciple of Buddha, I should do something for the temple. So I determined. The other day, you, my lord, took leave of some other noble gentlemen at the temple. You were sorry to find it in such disrepair and it was your kind intention to assist us. At that moment the host of Buddhas were your witnesses. I remember that we read in the sacred scriptures: If the pious men and women of this generation spend their wealth for the glory of the image of Buddha, reward shall come to them; their sons and grandsons shall be fair and strong; they shall pass all their examinations and their wives shall be honoured. I have come specially to you. Help me to accomplish this good deed, whether you give me five hundred or a thousand." He took out a silken cloth and, from it, the subscription list, and handed it with both hands to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Hsi-mên was moved by the monk's words and gladly took the appeal. He told a boy to bring tea for the monk and meanwhile looked at what was written.

A humble supplication [he read]. When, after the White Horse had borne the Sacred Books, the Religion of the

Buddha was made known, the glorious doctrines that had come from India were established in their various schools. Then all the monks of this great country were converted to the teaching of the Buddha. The Three Thousand Worlds were beautified. Now we have seen that this temple is in ruins and no longer worthy of its great name.

If we do not give alms, how shall we pride ourselves that we are disciples of the Buddha and men of virtue? This Temple of Eternal Felicity is a religious foundation of great antiquity, a holy place of sacrifice. It was built in the days of the Emperor Wu of Liang, and its founder was the Great Teacher Wan Hui. In those days it had splendid proportions and was modelled upon the garden of the Buddha himself. The floor was paved with gold and the adornments were of exquisite delicacy so that it resembled the monastery of Ch'i Yüan. The staircases were of white jade. Lofty towers soared to the heavens. So the religious atmosphere was made manifest in the skies. The foundations were solid and the main sanctuary could contain a thousand monks. The wings were magnificent with beautiful buildings. The cloisters were spotless and the whole building was like the dwelling of the Immortals.

In those days bells and drums announced the sacred principle of the Buddha and all men said: "Here is the abode of the Buddha in this world." The monks were learned and it was a paradise upon earth. But now, many years have passed and things have altered. Evil monks gave way to drink and broke their vows; so fond of sleep were they and idle that they never swept their monastery. Gradually it declined; the number of the monks decreased. It became a desert place and few came to worship there.

Snakes and rats made their holes in the walls; wind and rain wore them away. Pillars and walls, one after another, fell. The monks did nothing to repair them and the place crumbled into ruin. Day succeeded day, year followed year, and none thought to restore the buildings. Instead, the painted balustrades and panels were burned by the monks themselves to heat wine and tea; great pillars and beams were taken to exchange for salt and rice. The weather tarnished the gold upon the Lohan's body; the rain streamed

upon the Buddhas and their bodies crumbled into dust. Alas, thus was so gorgeous and beautiful a place, a treasure-house of gold and colour, transformed into a desert of weeds and brambles. Things prosper for a while and then decay, yet prosperity will return when ill fortune has done its worst.

This monk can no longer bear to see the ruin of the House of Buddha. He has sworn a great oath that he will go to all good people for their charity and stimulate their generous feelings. Whether they give a column, a beam, or simply wood; whatever it is, their names shall be remembered for ever. Whether they contribute silver or cloth, whatever we receive, their names shall be entered upon the roll of benefactors.

Trusting in the might and the wisdom of the Buddha, we call down blessings upon all good people that they may prosper for ever. We have confidence in the All-knowingness that father, son and grandson shall obtain high office and that their household shall be continued for ever. They shall beget wise sons who shall bring repute upon their families; their gold shall be piled as high as mountains and, whatever they ask for, it shall be granted them.

You to whom this shall come, may the spirit of parsimony depart from you.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had finished reading, he laid the writing on the table very carefully.

"Though I cannot call myself a rich man," he said to the monk, "I have a few thousands. I am a military officer, and for long no son was born to me. Last year, my sixth wife bore a child and I was content. The other day I happened to come to your monastery to take leave of some friends, and I thought then of giving money for the restoration. It is good of you to come and see me. I shall not refuse."

He took a brush and wondered how much he should put down. Ying Po-chüeh said: "Brother, since you seem so well disposed, why not pay the whole cost? I'm sure it would not be too much for you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed, the brush in his hand. "No," he said, "I cannot do that."

Po-chüeh said: "Well, at least a thousand."

Again Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "No, that's too much."

Then the monk spoke. "Noble sir," he said, "we monks of Buddha never press people to give. We take whatever they choose to give us. Write what you can afford. I only ask that you will commend the cause to your relatives and friends."

"You speak with wisdom, Master," Hsi-mên said, "I will not give less than five hundred." This sum he wrote down. The monk thanked him. "All the eunuchs and officers of the prefecture and the district are friends of mine. Go and see them. I am sure they will put down three hundred, two hundred, one hundred, or at least fifty, and you will certainly be able to restore your monastery." He gave the monk some vegetarian food and saw him to the door.

When he returned to the hall he said to Ying Po-chüeh: "I was just wishing to see you when you came. When I came back from the Eastern Capital my friends and relatives gave parties in my honour. To-day I am making a return and I should like you to stay. The monk interrupted us."

"A good monk that," Po-chüeh said. "Certainly a very holy man. I was quite touched while he was talking to you, and even I made my little contribution."

"What did you contribute?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked. "I didn't see you write it down."

Po-Chüeh laughed. "Ah, Brother," he said, "I fear that you do not understand. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that goodwill is the finest form of charity; then the teaching of religion; and, last of all, the giving of alms. Did I not urge you to give him money? That was charity of the first order."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "You certainly did, but I don't believe there was any particular goodwill about it."

They both laughed. "I will stay until your guests come," Po-chüeh said. "If you have anything to attend to, please don't mind me, but go and discuss it with your lady." Hsi-mên left Po-chüeh and went to the inner court. Golden Lotus was grumbling there but he paid no attention. She yawned and went to her room to sleep.

The Lady of the Vase, Heart's Delight, and the maids were trying to amuse Kuan Ko who was crying. The Moon Lady and Beauty of the Snow were superintending the cooks in the

kitchen. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to them and told them about the monk and the contribution he had made. He also told them the joke Ying Po-chüeh had made. They laughed.

The Moon Lady was a good woman. She said something to Hsi-mên Ch'ing which touched him deeply.

"Brother," she said, "you have been blessed by Heaven. A son has been born to you. Now you have had this generous idea of giving your money and the whole household will be the better for it. But the more good ideas the better, while evil ideas should be uprooted utterly. Brother, in days past you have not been all that you ought to have been. You have gone after whores and behaved improperly. This must stop. Then you will grow in virtue and it will be better for your son."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "That's a nice way to talk. And you're quite wrong. The world is based upon the interaction of the male and female principles and it is natural for men and women to be drawn together. Any irregular little affair that may happen in this present life was predetermined in a former one. It is all written down in the register of marriages. One cannot say that anything we do is out of depravity and evil passion. Besides, they tell me that gold is not despised, even in Paradise, and, in the ten regions of Hell, money is at a premium. So, if we are generous in almsgiving now, it won't do us any harm if we debauch the angels and run off with the daughters of the Mother of the Gods."

The Moon Lady laughed. "Dogs eat filth and think it's nice. They can't change their habits, because they are made that way."

They were still laughing when the two nuns, Wang and Hsüeh, came in with a bowl. They greeted the Moon Lady and Hsi-mên Ch'ing. The Moon Lady asked them to sit down.

Nun Hsüeh was not one who had been brought up in a convent from her youth. She had been a married woman and her husband had sold pies outside a temple. But the business did not prosper and she started a business of greater profit with the monks of the temple. Five or six of them enjoyed her favours. They used to send her bread and other things that the faithful had given them for sacrifice. They gave her money for ornaments and cloth which pious donors had presented to the temple, and she used the cloth to make shoes for her feet. All this was without her husband's knowledge. When he died,

as she had developed a keen enthusiasm for monasticism, she became a nun. She sent about conducting services in pious households and assisting wicked women in their unlawful loves. Seeing that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was a wealthy man with several wives she favoured his household with very frequent visits, hoping always to get more money.

The Buddhist nuns, of course, have not a hair
Upon their heads.
Night after night, they sport with the monks.
Three bald heads
The teacher and his two disciples.
What are the little cymbals doing on the bed?

Nun Hsüeh sat down and opened a small box. "We have really nothing to offer you," she said, "but I have brought a few fruits which have been offered to Buddha. They are perfectly fresh."

"It is good of you to come at all," the Moon Lady said. "There is no reason why you should trouble to bring presents."

Golden Lotus woke up and heard somebody talking. She thought it must be Hsi-mên Ch'ing again with the Lady of the Vase, and she got up to peep at them. But the Lady of the Vase was playing with the baby. When she knew that the two nuns were there she determined to ask their advice about the child and went to the Moon Lady's room. When she had come and greeted the nuns, Hsi-mên told them about the monk who had come to ask for alms. Golden Lotus was annoyed and went off muttering to herself.

When Hsüeh had listened to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, she rose and made a reverence to him. "With generosity such as yours," she said, "you must assuredly live a thousand years. You will have five sons and two daughters and they will live together with you. I have a suggestion to make. It will cost you very little and it will make you even more prosperous. If you accept this suggestion, even old Gautama who lived an ascetic life upon the Mountains of Snow, or the great Kāśyapa who could sweep the ground with his beard, or the Second Great Teacher who cut himself to shreds to feed a tiger, or old Chi Ku who poured the yellow gold upon the ground, will not be able to rival you in merit."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Sit down, most worthy Sister," he said. "Tell me what I must do and I will do it."

"Our Lord Buddha," the nun began, "has given us the T'o-lo scriptures to teach men the way to Paradise. Because those who see with the eyes of the flesh do not truly see and cannot truly believe, the Lord Buddha gave this teaching urging men to serve him faithfully that so they may attain to Paradise and escape from the turning of the wheel. The Buddha said: He who reads this book or prints it for others to read shall receive blessings unbounded. And in that book are charms for the protection of children. If people would engender boys and girls, first they should secure this text and recite it. Then their children will be easy to rear. No calamities will fall on them and blessings will be showered upon them. I know that the type of this book still exists but no one has reprinted it. Now, my lord, if you will spend a little money and print a few thousand copies, they can be sewn and distributed and you will have done a truly meritorious work."

"I see no objection," Hsi-mên said, "but first I must know how much the paper, the printing, and the binding will cost. Tell me that and I will have the work done."

"My lord," Nun Hsüeh said, "there is no need for you to be troubled with such details. Nine taels of silver will do to begin with. The printer can print a few thousand copies and, when the binding is finished, you can pay whatever else is needed."

Meanwhile Ch'ên Ching-chi was looking for Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He came to the harbour and there had the good fortune to find Golden Lotus. When she saw him, it was as though a cat suddenly espied a fish. Her melancholy disappeared at once and the soft winds of spring brought colour to her face. They saw that no one was about, held each other's hands and kissed, but they feared lest Hsi-mên Ch'ing might suddenly appear and were like a couple of rats, glancing about on one side and another as though they watched for the cat. They realised that there was no possibility for them to go further. Ch'ên Ching-chi ran away without telling Hsi-mên Ch'ing what he had come to say.

After hearing what Nun Hsüeh had to say, Hsi-mên was once more persuaded. He told Tai An to take thirty taels of

silver from a box and gave them to the nuns. "I will have five thousand copies printed," he said. "When the work is done I will check the accounts."

Then Shu T'ung came and said that all the guests had arrived. There were Uncle Wu, Uncle Hua, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Ch'ang Chih-chieh and the others. Hsi-mên hastily dressed and came out to see them. He ordered tables to be set and they took their places in due order. Then fish, meats and fruits were brought. Those who were present were all good friends, so formal politeness was dispensed with. They guessed fingers and played all sorts of games. Some of them sang songs. They all heartily enjoyed themselves.

Chapter Fifty-eight

MOONBEAM

HSI-MÊN CH'ING drank wine with his friends and relatives and got very drunk. When the party was over he went to Beauty of the Snow's room. She was in the kitchen watching everything being cleared away, but, when she heard that Hsi-mên had gone to her room, she hurried away. Miss Yü was in her room. Beauty of the Snow asked her to go to the Moon Lady's room where she could share a bed with Flute of Jade and the other maid. There were only three rooms in Beauty of the Snow's apartment. One had a couch and another a stove bed. It was more than a year since Hsi-mên Ch'ing had visited her. She quickly took his clothes and put them on a chair. Then she made the bed, washed herself with perfumed water, and went to make him some tea. When he had drunk it they took off their clothes and went to bed.

The next day was the twenty-eighth, Hsi-mên's birthday. When he had burned some paper offerings, a boy called Hu Hsiu came with a message from Han Tao-kuo. The servants told Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and Hsi-mên gave orders that he should be brought to the hall. He asked the boy where the boat was. Hu Hsiu gave him a letter with some accounts. "Uncle Han has bought silk in Hang-chou worth ten thousand taels," he said. "He has brought it as far as Lin-ch'ing and there he is waiting for money to pay the duty. Without it, he can't bring the goods to the city."

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had read the letter and looked at the accounts he was delighted. He ordered Ch'i T'ung to give Hu Hsiu something to eat and told the boy that, when he had done, he must go and take the news to Master Ch'iao. He himself went to see the Moon Lady. "Han," he said, "has arrived at Lin-ch'ing and he has sent this boy Hu Hsiu with the statements. We must get busy clearing the house opposite. We can store the goods there and I must look about for a man to take charge of the shop."

"Yes," the Moon Lady said, "there is no time to lose. It is late enough already."

"I will talk to Brother Ying about it when he comes," Hsi-mên said.

When Po-chüeh came, Hsi-mên took him to the hall and explained the situation.

"I came to congratulate you on your birthday," Po-chüeh said. "But now that your goods have come, I have still further reason to congratulate you. Their arrival on such a day is a good omen. You say you need a man. I happen to have an old friend who is the very fellow for you. He knows the silk trade inside out, but he has had bad luck and is out of employment at the moment. He is about forty years old. He is a good judge of silver; he can write and keep accounts, and all things considered, he is an excellent business man. His name is Kan and his second name Ch'u-shên. He lives in a house of his own in Stone Bridge Alley."

"Splendid!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Tell him to come and see me to-morrow."

Li Ming, Wu Hui and Chêng Fêng came and kotowed. In a short time the other musicians followed them. They were entertained in one of the side rooms. Then one of the servants came and said he had been to summon the singing-girls. "But I cannot get Moonbeam to come," he said. "Her old woman says she was all dressed and ready to start, when somebody came from the princely family of Wang and took her away. So I only got Exquisite, Graceful and Splendour."

"What rubbish!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing declared. "Not come indeed! and why not?" He turned to Chêng Fêng. "What does your sister mean by refusing to come? Is it true that anybody from Wang's place took her away?"

Chêng Fêng knelt down. "I do not live at home," he said, "I know nothing about it."

"She thinks if she says she is going to sing at Wang's place, that will settle the matter and I shall not be able to touch her." Then he said to Tai An: "Take my card and two soldiers and go to Wang's. Ask for the young lord Wang. Tell him that I am entertaining a few guests here to-day and that Moonbeam promised to come. We should be very much obliged if he would see that she does come. If there is any demur, arrest the old woman and throw her into gaol. Let her

see how she likes that." He told Chêng Fêng to go too. The boy dared not refuse, and went out with Tai An.

"Brother," Chêng Fêng said to Tai An, "you go in and I'll wait outside. I have no doubt that my lord Wang did send for her, but perhaps she has not gone yet. If she has not, tell her she really must come with us."

"If she has gone to Wang's place I shall take my master's card there," Tai An said, "but if she is still at home, you had better go and tell your mother to dress her quickly and we will all go back together. I will say what I can for you to Father, and it will be all right. You don't understand him. When he was at Master Hsia's place he arranged with her to come, and he is naturally annoyed when she does not turn up." Chêng Fêng went home and Tai An, with the two soldiers, followed him.

Meanwhile, Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Ying Po-chüeh: "The beastly little strumpet! She is ready enough to go and sing for others, but, when I tell her to come here, she won't come!"

"She is a little baggage," Po-chüeh said. "But she is not very experienced, and does not realise what a great man you are."

"I met her at a party," Hsi-mên said. "I thought she talked prettily so I told her to come and sing here, the young scamp."

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "the four wenches you have here to-day are as fine as any of their kind."

"But you haven't seen Moonbeam, Uncle," Li Ming said.

"Oh, yes I have," Po-chüeh said. "Your father and I went and drank wine at her place one day. She was very young then. But it is some years since I last saw her and I don't know what she is like now."

"The girl is well made," Li Ming said, "but she puts on rather too much paint. She knows a few songs but she is not half as good as Cassia. And what kind of a place does she imagine this house to be that she dares to refuse to come here? She ought to be grateful for the chance. She certainly does not know her luck."

While they were talking, Hu Hsiu came back. "I have been to see Master Ch'iao," he said. "Now I await your orders."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Ch'ên Ching-chi to get fifty taels

from the Moon Lady and told Hua T'ung to write a letter and seal it. Then he ordered a soldier to start early next morning and go with Hu Hsiu to the customs office. "Go and see Master Ch'ien," he said, "and ask him to be lenient when he looks over the goods."

Ch'ên Ching-chi brought the money. It was handed to Hu Hsiu, who took it with the letter and the papers connected with the payment of duty and arranged to leave the next morning.

Shortly after Hu Hsiu's departure, they could hear the shouts of men clearing the way. P'ing An came and announced the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh. Hsi-mên put on his robes and received the two eunuchs in the great hall. When they had exchanged greetings he invited them to go to the arbour to take off their ceremonial robes. They sat down, the two eunuchs in two large chairs in the place of honour, Ying Po-chüeh in a more lowly seat.

"Who is this gentleman?" said Hsüeh.

"You met him last year," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "It is my old friend Ying II."

"Ah," said Hsüeh, "the gentleman who made such excellent jokes!"

Po-chüeh bowed. "Your Excellency has an excellent memory. It was I."

Tea was brought. P'ing An came and said: "Major Chou has sent a man with a card to say that he is engaged elsewhere and will not be able to come early. He asks that you will please not wait for him."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at the card. "Very good!" he said.

"Sir," Eunuch Hsüeh said, "who is this who is coming late?"

"Chou Nan-hsüan. He is engaged elsewhere and has sent a man to ask us not to wait for him."

"We will leave a place for him," said the eunuch.

Then Wang Ching brought two cards and said: "The two scholars have arrived." Hsi-mên looked at the cards. On one was written Ni P'êng, and, on the other, Wên Pi-ku. Wên was the man whom Master Ni wished to recommend to him. He hastened out to welcome them and found the two scholars in academic dress. He paid particular attention to Wên Pi-ku,

who was a man of about forty years of age, of dignified and discreet appearance. There was hair upon his cheeks, and his manner was urbane and gentle.

Though he possessed incomparable talents
Often he went to the place where the Rites are despised.
His name and his achievements held no glory
And his ambition was, perforce, content with lowly things.
His fortunes had declined, and with them self-respect.
Philosophy and letters he left to Confucius.
The career of a public officer,
Or the desire to make a name for himself and his ancestors
Such notions as these he cast into the East River.
Now he foregathered with the scum of the earth
Only money was his goal.
Hail-fellow-well-met,
Without a care for shame or prudence.
He was tall of stature, and broad girdled
He could see no one before him.
He talked with an air and sang a pretty song
But his brain was empty.
Every three years, for the examination he would enter
But even a low degree was too much for him.
So now he has abandoned hope of climbing high
And sits with others to drink a cup of wine
To lessen melancholy,
Like a retired minister
Exiled to the mountains.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took them to the hall and each of them offered him a book and a handkerchief as a birthday present. They sat down in the places appropriate to host and guests.

"I have often heard of your great learning," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Will you tell me your honourable name?"

"My second name is Jih-hsin," said Master Wên, "and K'uei-hsüan is my honorific name."

"Master K'uei-hsüan, in what department of learning do you excel?"

"I am only a mean scholar," Master Wên said, "so I have begun upon the Book of Changes. Your great renown has long been known to me but I have never ventured to call upon you. Yesterday, my old school friend, Ni Kuei-yen,

spoke to me of your extraordinary virtues and I felt I must come and see you."

"It is very kind of you to pay me the first visit. I shall hope to return your call one of these days. I am a military officer and know little of literature and I have no one able to attend properly to my correspondence. The other day when I was visiting my colleague Hsia, I made the acquaintance of Master Ni and he spoke most highly of your attainments. I intended to call upon you, but you have come to me first and been good enough to bring me these gifts. I don't know how to express my appreciation."

"You flatter me," said Wên. "I am really devoid of learning and virtue."

When they had drunk tea, Hsi-mên asked them to go to the arbour where the two eunuchs were sitting. Hsüeh suggested that they should take off their academic robes, and they took off their gowns and joined the party, only taking their seats after they had been pressed to do so for some time.

Then Uncle Wu and Captain Fan arrived, and Tai An and Chêng Fêng came to say that the four singing-girls were now all present. "Is it true," Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked, "that she had been sent for by the princely family of Wang?"

"Yes," Tai An said, "but she had not started. I was about to arrest the old woman; that frightened them, and Moonbeam decided to come with me."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went out and stood on the steps to look at the four girls. They came forward together and kotowed. Moonbeam wore a long violet gown with a white-ribboned skirt beneath it. Her waist was like the willow, supple and full of the promise of delight. Her face was like a lotus blossom.

"Why did you not come when I sent for you?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to her. "Did you imagine you could escape me?"

Moonbeam kotowed without a word, then stood up and went smilingly to the inner court with the other girls. They kotowed to the Moon Lady and the others, and, finding Cassia and Silver Maid with the ladies, they greeted them too. "You came early," they said.

"We have been here two days," Cassia said. "What makes you so late?"

"It is all Moonbeam's fault," said Graceful. "We were

ready, but she wouldn't come and we had to wait." Moonbeam hid her face with her fan, laughed, but still said nothing.

"Who is this girl?" the Moon Lady said.

"Don't you know her, Mother?" said Graceful. "She is Exquisite's younger sister, and her name is Moonbeam. It is only six months since she was made a woman."

"She has a very fine figure," the Moon Lady said.

Golden Lotus pulled up Moonbeam's skirt and looked at her tiny feet. "Your shoes are too pointed; they are not like ours," she said. "In ours the proportions are as they should be, but your heels are too large."

"How impertinent she is," the Moon Lady said to Aunt Wu. "Why should she interfere in matters that do not concern her?"

Golden Lotus took a gold pin shaped like a fish from Moonbeam's head and said: "Where did you get this?"

"It was made by our own silversmith," Moonbeam told her. Tea and cakes were brought and the Moon Lady told Cassia and Silver Maid to join the others. The six singing-girls sat down together.

After tea, Cassia and Silver Maid invited the other girls to go to the garden with them, but Graceful said: "We must go to the outer court first." Cassia and Silver Maid went with Golden Lotus and Tower of Jade. They kept away from the great arbour because there were many guests there and, after looking at the flowers for a while, they went to the Lady of the Vase's room to see Kuan Ko. The baby was ill again. He kept waking up out of a bad dream and he would not take his milk. The Lady of the Vase had to spend all her time in her own room looking after him. When they came she asked them to sit down.

"Is the baby asleep?" Cassia said.

"He has been crying for a long time, but he has gone to sleep now," the Lady of the Vase said.

"The Great Lady tells me she is going to send for old woman Liu," Tower of Jade said. "Why don't you send a boy and ask her to come at once?"

"It is Father's birthday to-day," the Lady of the Vase said, "I think I will wait until to-morrow."

Then the four singing-girls came with Orchid and Tiny

Jade. "So you are here," said Orchid. "We have been looking all round the garden for you."

"There were so many people about we did not stay long," Tower of Jade said.

"What were you doing all that time in the inner court?" Cassia said to Splendour.

"We were having tea in the Fourth Lady's room."

Golden Lotus looked at Tower of Jade and the Lady of the Vase. Then she laughed. "Who told you she was the Fourth Lady?"

"She asked us to go and take tea in her room," Graceful said, "and, since we had not been presented to her before, we asked her what was her position in the household and she said: 'I am the Fourth Lady.'"

"The hussy!" Golden Lotus cried. "It would have been more becoming if somebody else had said so for her. In this house she is of no account at all; nobody calls her the Fourth Lady. But she has had her husband in her room for one night. Now she has managed to scrape a little colour together and is all agog to start a dye-works. If it hadn't been that Aunt Wu was in the Great Lady's room, Cassia in the Second Lady's room, Aunt Yang in the Third Lady's room, the Silver Maid in the Sixth Lady's room, and my mother in mine, he would never have dreamed of going to her."

"You ought to have seen her this morning," Tower of Jade said. "When she had seen Father to her door she flaunted herself about the courtyard, with a 'Here, Chang!' and a 'Now, you Li!' making a tremendous fuss of herself."

"Well," Golden Lotus said, "the proverb says: 'Never indulge a slave, and never spoil a child.'" She said to Tiny Jade: "I hear your father told the Great Lady he was going to buy that woman a maid. Last night, when he was in her room, he found it all at sixes and sevens. He asked her, and the little strumpet seized the opportunity and told him she was so busy all day she had not time to clean her room. She said she only went there to sleep and that was all. So he said: 'Don't worry about that any more. I will ask the Great Lady to get you a maid.' Is this true?"

"I know nothing about it," Tiny Jade said. "Perhaps Flute of Jade heard it."

"Your father would never have thought of going to her," Golden Lotus said to Cassia, "if all our rooms had not been occupied. I am not one to talk about people behind their backs, but she is a very undiscerning sort of woman. And she has a very nasty tongue. I never speak to her if I can avoid it."

Welcome Spring brought tea. While they were drinking it, sounds of music reached them from the outer court. The guests had all arrived and the banquet was ready. Tai An came and called the four singing-girls. Master Ch'iao did not come that day.

First there was an act from one of the Hundred Dramas; then music and songs. After a few scenes food was brought in. Soup was the first course. Then Dr Jên arrived, dressed in robes of ceremony. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the great hall. Dr Jên brought out a handkerchief with the symbol for longevity embroidered on it and offered it, with two pieces of white gold, to Hsi-mên as a birthday present. "Yesterday," he said, "Han Ming-ch'uan told me of your birthday. I am sorry I am so late."

"I am most grateful for your coming," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "With these delightful presents too. And I must congratulate you on the wonderful medicine you were good enough to send us."

Dr Jên wished to offer a cup of wine to Hsi-mên Ch'ing as a mark of respect, but Hsi-mên politely refused to allow it. Then Dr Jên took off his ceremonial robes and they joined the others. He sat at the fourth seat on the left, next to Uncle Wu. When soup and rice had been served, Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave Dr Jên's servant a box of food. Dr Jên thanked him and told the servant to take it away.

Then the four singing-girls sang the birthday song. More food was brought and wine was passed round. The actors brought their repertory list and the eunuchs selected the play 'Han Hsiang-tzŭ saves Ch'ên Pan-chieh'. When the first act was done, they heard the noise of men clearing the way. P'ing An came in to announce the arrival of Major Chou. Hsi-mên Ch'ing hastened to welcome him and, without waiting for the usual greetings, asked him to take off his ceremonial clothes. "But let me first offer you a cup of wine," Major Chou said.

"No," said Eunuch Hsüeh, "do not offer him wine, noble Chou. Greet each other with a simple reverence." This they did and Major Chou bowed to the other guests. He sat down in the third place on the left. Food was brought for him, then two plates of pies, two plates of meat, and two jars of wine. This was for Major Chou's servants. Major Chou thanked his host and bade his servant take the food away. They passed wine to each other. With singing, dancing and music, they had a very happy time.

They drank until sunset. Dr Jên was the first to leave. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the gate. "How is your lady?" the doctor said. "Is she better?"

"She was better immediately she took your medicine," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but for some reason or other she has been none too well these last few days. You must come and see her again. "Dr Jên mounted his horse and rode away.

The two scholars Ni and Wên rose. Hsi-mên urged them to stay longer but they would not. Hsi-mên went to see them off. "I will come and see you," he said to Wên. "I will have a study prepared for you to live in and you must bring your family. Every month I shall offer a small sum for your beans and water."

"You are most kind," said Master Wên.

Master Ni exclaimed: "A noble gentleman indeed, who recognises literature so handsomely!"

When they had gone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing returned and drank with his guests. The party did not come to an end until the first night-watch. The four singing-girls went to the Moon Lady's room and sang a few songs for the ladies. In the front court, Hsi-mên asked Ying Po-chüeh and Uncle Wu to stay. He gave food to the actors and dismissed them. The servants cleared the tables and Hsi-mên called for dessert. Then he bade Li Ming, Wu Hui and Chêng Fêng come and sing, and gave them wine.

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "this has been a splendid entertainment and your guests have been well pleased."

Li Ming said that the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, had been very generous in their presents and they had left a packet of silver for Cassia and Silver Maid. "His Excellency Hsüeh is younger than the other," the boy said, "and that makes him more lively."

Hua T'ung brought dessert. Po-chüeh noticed some pastries among the different dishes. He picked out one and put it in his mouth. It melted away at once. It seemed like exquisite dew falling upon his heart. "This is excellent," he said.

"Oh, when it comes to eating, you know well enough how to pick out something good," Hsi-mên said to him. "Your sixth mother made those."

Po-chüeh laughed. "To show her daughterly devotion to me," he said. Then he said: "Uncle, won't you try one?" picked one out and put it into Uncle Wu's mouth. He gave one to Li Ming and Chêng Fêng.

While they were drinking, Po-chüeh said to Tai An: "Go to the inner court and tell the four little strumpets to come here. I can do very well without them, but I want them to sing for your uncle. He cannot stay much longer and, after all, they have only sung one or two songs all day. It won't do to let them off too lightly."

Tai An did not move. He said: "I did speak to them but they are singing for the ladies now. Doubtless they will be here in a few moments."

"When did you speak to them, you young rascal?" Ying Po-chüeh said. He told Wang Ching to go, but Wang Ching paid no attention. "You won't go, won't you?" said Po-chüeh. "Then I will go myself." But, as he spoke, the scent of perfume came to them and they could hear laughing voices. The four singing-girls, with kerchiefs on their heads, came in.

"What!" cried Po-chüeh, "are you going without singing for us? That's too much of a good thing! Your sedan-chairs alone cost four ch'ien of silver, and for that money we could buy quite a lot of rice, enough to keep your whole households for a month."

"Brother," Graceful said, "if you think we can earn a living so easily as all that, why don't you come and join us?"

"It is very late," Splendour said, "almost the second night-watch. We really must go."

And Exquisite said: "We have to get up very early in the morning to go to a funeral."

"Whose funeral?" said Po-chüeh.

"At a house where the doors open underneath the eaves," Exquisite replied.

"Doubtless young Master Wang's," said Po-chüeh. "You got into trouble over that young man before, but luckily for you this gentleman sent to the Eastern Capital and had the matter hushed up for Cassia's sake. You were forgiven too. Now you put on the airs of a bird that has escaped from a cage."

Exquisite laughed. "Don't talk nonsense, old oily mouth!"

"Are you making fun of me because I am old?" Po-chüeh said. "I fancy I still have some good points. Anyhow, I can manage you four little strumpets without any difficulty."

Exquisite laughed again. "Brother," she said, "I can't see you very well but it is obvious that you are boasting."

"When I spend my money," Po-chüeh returned, "I insist upon having something worth paying for. You young strumpets of the Chêng family appear to have eaten something which makes you talk too much. You seem lost."

"After listening to you," said Graceful, "she dare not open her mouth."

"I don't care whether she is afraid of me or not. Bring your instruments and each of you sing a song. Then I will let you go."

"Very well," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "two of you shall serve us with wine and the other two shall sing."

Then Exquisite said: "I and my sister will sing." Moonbeam took her lute and Exquisite her guitar. They sat down and sang very sweetly: 'Darkness has gone, the dawn is here.' Graceful offered wine to Uncle Wu, and Splendour to Ying Po-chüeh.

After they had drunk several cups of wine and the girls had finished singing, Hsi-mên Ch'ing still pressed Uncle Wu to stay and sent for Ch'un Hung to sing some songs of the south. Then he told Ch'i T'ung to saddle a horse and take a lantern to see Uncle Wu to his home. But Wu said: "Brother, don't order a horse for me. I will go with Brother Ying." Hsi-mên bade Ch'i T'ung accompany them with a lantern. He himself went as far as the gate with them. As they were standing at the gate, Hsi-mên said to Ying Po-chüeh:

"Don't forget about Kan. I am going to make a contract with him. Then I will join with my kinsman Ch'iao, and we will get the house ready for the storage of the goods."

"I will not forget," Po-chüeh said. He went away with Uncle Wu. Ch'i T'ung, carrying a lantern, went with them.

"My brother-in-law spoke about getting the house ready. What house does he mean?" Uncle Wu said.

"Han Tao-kuo has arrived with the goods he has bought," Ying Po-chüeh said, "and his Lordship is going to start a silk shop in the house facing his own."

"When is he going to open it?" Uncle Wu said. "We are his kinsmen and friends, and we ought to do something to mark the occasion."

They left the main street and came to the lane in which Ying Po-chüeh lived. Uncle Wu said to Ch'i T'ung: "Take Uncle Ying to his door."

Po-chüeh declined. "No," he said, "go with your uncle. I don't need a light. My house is close by." They separated and Ch'i T'ung went with Uncle Wu.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing paid and dismissed Li Ming and the others and went to sleep in the Moon Lady's room.

The next day Ying Po-chüeh brought Kan Ch'u-shên to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Kan was wearing black clothes. They discussed terms, then Hsi-mên sent for Ts'ui Pên and told him to go and see Master Ch'iao and find out what Ch'iao thought about the arrangement of the house, and when they should open their shop. "I will do everything your master wishes," Ch'iao said to Ts'ui Pên. "He need not worry about me." So Hsi-mên Ch'ing made a contract with Kan, with Ying Po-chüeh as the witness. It was decided that, out of the profits, three parts of every ten should be for Hsi-mên Ch'ing, three for Ch'iao, and the remaining four should be divided equally between Han Tao-kuo, Kan Ch'u-shên and Ts'ui Pên. They set to work upon the warehouse, had signs painted, and only waited for the merchandise to come so that they might start business. At home, Hsi-mên Ch'ing cleared one of the courts for Master Wên to occupy as his secretary. He arranged to pay his new secretary three taels of silver as salary each month, and to make him appropriate gifts at the different seasons. Hua T'ung was instructed to wait upon the scholar. When all these arrangements were completed Hsi-mên gave a series of parties.

After his birthday celebrations, he sent for Dr Jên to see

the Lady of the Vase. Then he went to the house opposite to see how the men were getting on with their work. Aunt Yang went home but Cassia and Silver Maid still remained. The Moon Lady took three ch'iens of silver and bought some crabs. She boiled them and, when dinner-time came, invited Aunt Wu, Cassia, Silver Maid and the ladies to come and enjoy them.

The Moon Lady had sent for old woman Liu to come and see Kuan Ko. After taking tea, the old woman went with the Lady of the Vase to her apartments. The baby, she said, had been frightened and could not digest his food. She gave the Lady of the Vase some medicine for him. The Moon Lady gave her a small fee and dismissed her.

Meanwhile, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, Cassia, Silver Maid and Orchid were in one of the flower arbours. They had a small table and played dominoes. Beauty of the Snow was there too. She lost her game and was made to drink seven or eight cups of wine. Then she went away and the others asked the Lady of the Vase to take her place. Golden Lotus asked Cassia and Silver Maid to sing for them. They made merry all day, and, at sunset, the Moon Lady had the food boxes of the two singing-girls filled and sent them home.

Golden Lotus had had too much to drink. She saw her husband going again to the Lady of the Vase and remembered that, the same morning, he had sent for Dr Jên to see her. She was consumed by jealousy but she dared not go to him because she knew the baby was not well. As she was going in the dark to her own room she trod upon some filth. When she reached her room, she asked Plum Blossom for a light. Her scarlet silk shoes were ruined. Her eyebrows went up and her eyes opened wide. She told Plum Blossom to get a stick, take a lamp, close the corner door, and give the dog a beating. The dog set up a terrible howling. The Lady of the Vase sent Welcome Spring to say that the baby had just taken old woman Liu's medicine and gone to sleep. She asked that Golden Lotus would stop beating the dog. But Golden Lotus sat and made no answer. The dog-beating continued. At last she allowed the dog to run away and began to grumble at Chrysanthemum. The more she looked at her shoes, the more her anger increased. She called Chrysanthemum and said:

"It was your business to drive the dog out. What do you mean by letting him stay there? Is that dog your lover that you can't bear to part with him? My new shoes, that I've only worn for three or four days, are completely ruined. You know you ought to have had a light showing for me when I came in. Why did you pretend not to know I was coming?"

"Before you came," Plum Blossom said, "I told her to feed the dog and put him out. She wouldn't listen but looked at me like a fool."

"Oh, yes, the bold slave!" Golden Lotus cried. "I know you must be beaten before you will do anything. Come here and look at my shoes."

Chrysanthemum went forward and stooped to look at them. Golden Lotus struck her in the face with one. The girl's face was cut: she drew back and tried to stop the blood with her hand.

"You slave! You slave! Would you try to escape me?" Golden Lotus cried. Then to Plum Blossom: "Pull her here: drag her here, and go get the whip. Take off her clothes and let me give her thirty stripes. If she tries to get away, I'll give her more."

Plum Blossom pulled off Chrysanthemum's clothes. Golden Lotus bade her hold the girl's hands, and the blows fell upon her body like rain-drops. Chrysanthemum shrieked and cried like a pig being killed.

Kuan Ko had only just closed his eyes and now he was waked up by the noise. Once more Welcome Spring came to Golden Lotus. "Mother asks you please to forgive Chrysanthemum. She is afraid the noise will frighten the baby."

Old woman P'an was lying on the bed in the inner room. When she heard the noise she got up. She asked her daughter to stop, but Golden Lotus would not listen to her. When the Lady of the Vase sent her maid again, old woman P'an took the whip from her daughter's hands. "Daughter," she said, "don't beat the girl any more. Your sister is afraid that the noise will upset the baby. I don't mind your beating this donkey, but we must not harm the treasure of the household."

Golden Lotus was already wild enough, but when she heard her mother's words she was infuriated. Her mind was so enraged that her face became purple. She pushed her mother

away and the old woman all but fell down. "You old fool," she screamed. "Keep yourself in your place and don't interfere with me. What treasure indeed? What donkey? You are in league with everybody else to injure me."

"Why! nothing of the sort," the old woman said. "I only come to get a little cold food. Why do you treat me so badly?"

"Take your old queynt off to-morrow," Golden Lotus said. "I can tell you that nobody is going to get the better of me in this place."

The old woman went to her room and wept. Golden Lotus went on beating Chrysanthemum. It seemed like two or three thousand stripes. Then she took a stick and Chrysanthemum's skin and flesh were torn. Before she let the girl go, she drove her nails into her cheeks and scratched her face all over.

The Lady of the Vase covered the baby's ears with her two hands. She was furious but she did not dare to say any more. She cried.

That day Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been taking wine in the house opposite with Ying Po-chüeh, Ts'ui Pên and his new manager Kan. Afterwards he went to sleep with Tower of Jade.

The next day Major Chou invited him to go to a birthday party and he went. The Lady of the Vase saw that her child was no better, although he had taken old woman Liu's medicine, and, as a result of the noise in the night, his eyes were upturned. The two nuns, Hsüeh and Wang, came. The Lady of the Vase went to the Moon Lady's room and said: "Here are a pair of silver lions that I have taken from the baby's bed. I am going to give them to Sister Hsüeh so as to have some Buddhist scriptures printed and given away in the temple on the fifteenth day of the eighth month."

Nun Hsüeh took the silver lions and was going away with them when Tower of Jade stopped her. "Wait a moment," she said. "Sister, you must get Pên IV to weigh them. When we know the weight, Pên IV can go with her and we shall know how much we shall have to pay for these copies of the scriptures. Pên IV had better see to it, for our teacher Hsüeh is not expert in such matters."

"You are right," the Moon Lady said. She sent Lai An to fetch Pên IV. When Pên IV came he made a reverence to

the ladies and weighed the silver. It came to forty-one taels and five ch'iens. The Moon Lady told him to go with Nun Hsüeh to the printer to arrange for the printing of the texts.

Golden Lotus said to Tower of Jade: "We will take the two teachers to the gate and then go to see Orchid. She is making shoes in her room." Holding each other's hands, they went to the outer court. Pên IV and the two nuns went out, and Golden Lotus and Tower of Jade went to the rooms at the side of the great hall. They found Hsi-mên's daughter making shoes under the eaves. Golden Lotus picked up the shoes and looked at them. They were of green Nan-ching silk.

"You shouldn't have made the designs in red," Tower of Jade said. "Blue would have been better, for you will have to have red heels."

"I have a pair with red heels," Orchid said. "That is why I am making this pair in red with blue heels."

They sat down. Tower of Jade asked if Ch'ên Ching-chi was in. "He is asleep indoors," said Orchid. "He has been drinking somewhere, I don't know where."

"If I hadn't spoken as I did," Tower of Jade said to Golden Lotus, "that foolish Sixth Sister of ours would have given all that silver to the nuns. If they had once gone off with it we should never have seen them again. That is why I suggested sending Pên IV with them. They could have taken refuge with some people of importance and we should never have been able to get them out again."

"The nuns would be fools if they didn't make money out of rich ladies," Golden Lotus said. "To get a sum like that from her is like pulling a hair out of a cow. She wishes to save the baby's life because she knows she will never get another if this one dies, even though she gives mountains and rivers for charity. This printing of a few texts is a trifle. In our house it seems that some people are allowed to set the house on fire but we mayn't even light our lamps. You are no stranger and this is our sister, so there is no harm in my saying that that lady indulges herself too much. She sends for the doctor even in the early morning. Of course it is no business of ours. What annoys me is the way she says in front

of others: 'Your father comes to see the baby and wants to sleep with me but I always send him to the other ladies.' I am good-natured enough in all conscience, yet she is always complaining about me. The Great Lady always seems to take her side. Yesterday Father did not go to her room. What does she do but send a maid to the corner door to ask him to go and look at the baby. Then she took some medicine and told her husband to sleep with Silver Maid. You see how clever she is. He was delighted, of course, and the Great Lady didn't seem to mind. Yesterday when I was going to my room, I got my shoes all dirty and told my maid to drive the dog out. That displeased her and she sent Welcome Spring to say the noise was frightening the baby. That old fool of a mother of mine told me to stop and said she was afraid of frightening the precious treasure. I was angry. I said something nasty to my mother and now she has gone off in a huff. The best thing she could do, perhaps. We can manage well enough without that poor old woman."

Tower of Jade laughed. "How badly you have been brought up," she said. "You should not talk like that about your own mother."

"Well, she annoyed me. She always was deceitful and ready to take anybody's part but mine. Anyone who will give her half a bowl of rice can always count on her support. If anyone gives her a little something she likes she will remember it with gratitude for ever. As for the other, after that baby's birth she got our husband to stay there as if he had taken root. If he were to make her his first wife she would throw us in the mud and trample on us. But Heaven has eyes, and that accounts for the baby's illness."

Then Pên IV came back. He was on his way to the Moon Lady's room, but, seeing the three ladies, he stopped outside the second door and did not venture to go further. Lai An came and said: "Ladies, Pên IV is here."

"Well, you rascal, let him come in," Golden Lotus said. "We saw him only a moment or two ago."

Lai An told Pên IV. He put something over his head and hurried through to the inner court to see the Moon Lady and the Lady of the Vase. He explained that the two nuns had given the printer forty-one taels and five ch'ien. Five

hundred copies were to be printed with silk covers, each of which would cost five fêns and a thousand copies in thinner silk which would cost three fêns apiece. That would be fifty-five taels all together. We still have to pay the printer thirteen taels and five ch'iens," he said. "He has promised to send all the copies here on the fourteenth."

The Lady of the Vase went to her room and brought a silver perfume box. She gave it to Pên IV, who weighed it and found it to be fifteen taels. "Take it," the Lady of the Vase said, "pay the printer and keep the rest for your expenses when you go to the temple to give out the texts. It will save you the trouble of coming to ask me again." Pên IV took the box. As he was going away the Lady of the Vase said: "Fourth Brother, I thank you."

Pên IV bowed. "You are very kind," he said. Then he went to the front court. There Golden Lotus and Tower of Jade stopped him.

"Have you given the silver to the printer?" Tower of Jade asked.

"Yes," he said. "I have arranged for the printing of fifteen hundred copies. I paid forty-one taels and five ch'iens and now the Sixth Lady has given me this silver box." Golden Lotus and Tower of Jade looked at the box but said nothing. Pên IV went out.

"Our Sixth Sister is wasting her money," Tower of Jade said. "If the baby is destined to live, nothing can kill him. If he is destined to die, his life won't be saved by any distributing of texts. If she trusts the nuns they will make a fool of her."

They got up. "Let us go and look out of the gate," Golden Lotus said. They asked Orchid to go with them but she declined. Golden Lotus took Tower of Jade by the hand and they went to the gate together. When they got there she asked P'ing An if the house opposite had been made ready.

"Yesterday," P'ing An said, "Father made the workmen clear it out and fix up the rooms in the back court as a warehouse. The Master of the Yin Yang came and blessed the starting of operations. The ground floor is being divided into three rooms, and shelves are being set up for the silk. The rooms at the front are to be made into a shop, and the painters

have been told to decorate them. Next month the shop will be opened."

Tower of Jade asked if Master Wên's family had moved in.

"Yes," P'ing An said, "they came yesterday. This morning Father gave instructions that they were to be supplied with a bed, two tables, and two chairs."

"Did you see his wife?" Golden Lotus said.

"She came in a sedan-chair," P'ing An said, "and it was too dark for me to see her."

As they were talking, they heard 'Ting, Ting, Ting', and an old man came along shaking a brass rattle. "Here is the polisher of mirrors," Golden Lotus said to P'ing An. "My mirror needs polishing. It is very tarnished. I told you to look out for a polisher and you forgot all about it. Now, the very minute we come here, one comes along."

P'ing An stopped the old man, who put down his things. "If you have any mirrors to clean," Golden Lotus said to Tower of Jade, "tell the boys to bring them out." Then she said to Lai An: "Go to my room and ask Plum Blossom for my mirrors, the large one and the two small ones and the square one I use for dressing. See that he gets a good polish on them."

Tower of Jade said to him: "Go to my room and ask Fragrance for my mirrors." Lai An went and came back with mirrors large and small, eight altogether in his hands, and the square one pressed against his chest.

"You foolish boy," Golden Lotus said, "you can't carry all those mirrors. Why didn't you make two journeys? You will make dints in them, holding them all together like that."

"I have never seen that big mirror of yours," Tower of Jade said to Golden Lotus. "Where did you get it?"

"It came from the pawn-shop," Golden Lotus said. "I like its brightness. That's why I keep it in my room." She said to the boy: "Only three of those mirrors are mine."

Tower of Jade said: "and only two are mine."

"Whose are the rest?" Golden Lotus said.

"The other two are Sister Plum Blossom's," the boy said. "She gave them to me so that they might be cleaned with yours."

"The cunning little wretch!" Golden Lotus said. "She never uses her own mirrors but always mine. That's why mine are so dull."

The boy gave the mirrors to the old man who sat down on a bench, brought out his quicksilver and, in a very short time, polished them all till they shone again. Golden Lotus took one up and looked at herself. The mirror was like pure clear water.

The lotus and the water chestnut
Cast their reflection on the water.
The breeze brings ripples to the surface
And the green shadows move darkly.
In a pool of autumn waters the lotus appears
Like Ch'ang O in the moon.

She gave the mirrors to Lai An to take back. Tower of Jade told P'ing An to go to the shop and ask Fu for some coppers for the old man. He took the money but did not move away. "Ask the old man why he doesn't go away," Tower of Jade said to P'ing An. "Perhaps he thinks we have not paid him enough." The old man wept.

"My mistress wants to know why you are so distressed," P'ing An said to him.

"Brother," said the old man, "I am sixty-one years old, and I have a son who is twenty-one. He is unmarried but he will do nothing for a living. He gads about everywhere, and I have to come out to the street day after day to earn a little money to support him. He is such an undutiful son that he even takes my money and goes gambling with it. The other day he was mixed up in some trouble and they took him to the courts. There they dealt with him as a pick-pocket and beat him twenty times. When he came home he took his mother's clothes and pawned them all. That upset his mother so much she had to take to her bed and she has stayed there this last fortnight. I upbraided him and he went away. He did not come back and I have looked everywhere for him in vain. Sometimes I think I will not bother to look for him any more, but I am old and he is my only son. There is only he to take my body to the grave. Yet when he is at home he makes me angry. Life isn't worth living. I suffer so much

and have no place to complain. I would cry my heart out if I could."

"Go and ask him how old his wife is," Tower of Jade said to P'ing An.

"She is fifty-five," the old man said. "She has no children of her own, and she has been ill ever since this trouble. She is getting better now, but I have nothing to give her to feed her up. She keeps asking for preserved meat. I have been begging everywhere these last few days but nobody will give me any."

"Never mind," Tower of Jade said, "I have some in my room." She told Lai An to go and ask her maid for two pieces.

Golden Lotus said: "Would your wife like some gruel made of small grain?"

"Would she not?" cried the old man. "Where is there any? If she could only have some she would be delighted."

Golden Lotus told Lai An to ask Plum Blossom for two measures of new small grain from that which old woman P'an had brought her, and two dried melons. When he returned he brought the preserved meat, two measures of small grain and two dried melons. "Old man," he said, "you are in luck's way. I understand your old woman is just getting over childbirth, and this small grain gruel will make her feel comfortable inside."

The old man stretched out both his hands and took what was brought for him. He put it with his tools, bowed to the ladies, slung everything over his shoulder and went off sounding his rattle.

"Mothers," said P'ing An, "you shouldn't have given him so much. He has defrauded you. His wife is a go-between. I saw her on the street only a day or two ago. She hasn't been at home at all."

"Why didn't you tell me so before, you rascal?" Golden Lotus said.

"I told him he was lucky to have met you two ladies," P'ing An said.

Chapter Fifty-nine

THE DEATH OF KUAN KO

The maple leaves are turning red
The other leaves are already yellow.
Her hair is white as the morning frost
For he of whom she thinks
Is at the gate of the underworld
And she will see him no more.

Though she cries out her heart
There is none to carry her message to the other world.
It is far distant, and the way is covered
With the mist of sorrow.
The pearl is buried
And all earthly things are forgotten.
If her tears were drops of rain
They would fill the Eastern Ocean
With sorrow eternal.

THE old mirror-cleaner had just gone when suddenly a man came from the East galloping towards them on muleback. He was wearing eye-shades and a broad-brimmed hat. He pulled up at the gate and the two ladies hastily withdrew. When he took off the eye-shades they knew it was Han Tao-kuo. P'ing An asked him if the merchandise had come.

"All the waggons are inside the city," Han said; "I want to know where we are to unload them."

"Our master is at Major Chou's place," P'ing An said, "but he told me that everything has to be put into the house opposite. Please come in."

A moment later, Ch'ên Ching-chi came to take Han Tao-kuo to see the Moon Lady. When he came out, he brushed the dust and dirt from his clothes and told Wang Ching to take his baggage home. The Moon Lady ordered a meal to be served for him. Soon all the waggons arrived. Ch'ên Ching-chi took the key and unlocked the doors. The porters carried in box after box of merchandise, ten great waggon-loads in all, and did not finish till evening. Ts'ui Pên was there

to help, and everybody took a hand in the work. The doors were locked again and sealed. Then the porters were paid and dismissed.

Tai An went to Major Chou's house to tell Hsi-mên Ch'ing that the goods had come, and Hsi-mên, after drinking a few more cups of wine, came home. Han Tao-kuo was waiting for him in the great hall. They sat down and Han told his master the whole story from beginning to end.

"Did you give my letter to his Lordship Ch'ien?" Hsi-mên asked. "Did he make things easier?"

"Oh, yes!" Han Tao-kuo said. "Because of that letter, though we had ten waggon-loads we paid very much less than the amount due. At the customs I reckoned two boxes as one, and we made out that only two-thirds of them contained silk and that the rest held only tea and incense. So, though we had ten big waggon-loads we only paid thirty taels and five ch'ien's duty. His Lordship accepted my list without going through the boxes, and passed everything through."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted to hear this. "We must send his Lordship a handsome present," he said. He told Ch'ên Ching-chi to entertain Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pên. Afterwards, Han Tao-kuo went home.

When Porphyry heard that her husband had returned, she bade her maid prepare a specially good meal and waited until the evening. When he came in he made a reverence before the domestic shrine, took off his clothes, washed, and they began to talk. Han Tao-kuo told his wife that his mission had been very successful. Porphyry remarked that there seemed to be a good deal of money in his pockets. He told her he had bought two hundred taels' worth of goods on his own account, wine and rice and so forth. These he had left outside the city and, when he came to sell them, he would certainly do well out of them. Porphyry was very pleased. "Wang Ching," she said, "tells me that there is now a new manager called Kan, and it has been arranged that we and Brother Ts'ui are to share equally with him in the profits. This will be all to our advantage. The shop is to be opened next month."

"If there is someone here to look after the shop," Han Tao-kuo said, "we shall need a man to go to the south to make the necessary purchases. I suppose our master will send me."

"You silly fellow," Porphyry said, "a man who is really capable always gets more work than other people. If our master trusts you it is because you are such a clever business man. The proverb says: No man can make money without working for it. If you are sent away for a year or two, I will speak to his Lordship and have you brought back; Kan or Lai Pao can be sent in your place. Then you will be able to work at home."

"Oh, I don't mind," Han Tao-kuo said. "After all, I have a good deal of experience in this outside trade."

"You must not let it upset you," his wife said. "You will have more to do than if you were at home."

Wine was brought. Husband and wife pledged each other. Then they went to bed and enjoyed a pleasant night.

The next day was the first of the eighth month. Hsi-mên's merchandise had come and he was free. He decided to go and visit Moonbeam. He quietly gave Tai An three taels of silver and a light dress and told him to take them to the girl. When the old procuress heard that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was coming she was delighted. He might have been a gift from Heaven. She took the presents and said to Tai An: "Tell his Lordship that both my girls are waiting anxiously for him. He must come early." Tai An returned and told Hsi-mên Ch'ing in his study.

That afternoon, Hsi-mên told Tai An to have his sedan-chair brought round. He dressed in a large hat, a black summer gown, and a pair of black shoes with white soles. Before leaving he went to the house opposite and saw how the workers were getting on. Then he got into the chair and pulled down the bamboo blind. Ch'in T'ung and Tai An went with him. Wang Ching was left at home and Ch'un Hung was sent in advance with Hsi-mên Ch'ing's things.

Exquisite, dressed in her best clothes, stood smiling at the door to receive Hsi-mên Ch'ing. She led him to the reception-room and made reverence to him. Hsi-mên told Ch'in T'ung to take the chair home and return that evening with a horse. Only Tai An and Ch'un Hung remained.

The old procuress came to welcome Hsi-mên. "My daughter troubled you the other day," she said, "and now you have been kind enough to visit us. But why did you send those

presents? I must thank you very much indeed for the dress you sent my daughter."

"Why didn't she come when I sent for her?" Hsi-mên said. "Why did you say she had to go to Wang's?"

"I haven't forgiven Graceful and Cassia yet," the old woman said. "They never told us it was your birthday. So, that day, they both brought you presents and my poor girl had nothing to offer. Besides, if we had known, we should have got out of that engagement at Wang's place. You would certainly have had the first claim. Then you sent your servant for her. I got into a flurry, and, without letting Wang's people know anything about it, I sent her off to you by the back door."

"I spoke to her about it when I was taking wine with Magistrate Hsia," Hsi-mên said. "If it had not been for that I should not have minded. What made me so angry was that she never sent me word, but simply stayed away. I want to know why that was."

"Since that little baggage has become a woman," the old woman said, "she has not been at all eager to go out to sing. She knew that there would be a number of guests at your house, and she was shy. She has been brought up very tenderly. She has only just got up now, as you see, and I had to urge her several times. I said to her: 'You must get up at once because his Lordship Hsi-mên is coming,' but she has only just done so."

The maid brought tea and Exquisite offered a cup to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then the old procuress invited him to go to the inner court. Exquisite took him to her sister's room. He saw a scroll hanging on the wall with the words 'Moonbeam Hall'. He sat down; the lattice was raised, and Moonbeam came in. She wore no net upon her hair. It was simply dressed in the fashion of Hang-chou. It shone with a glossy blackness, coil upon coil like a black mist. Her double-breasted gown was of white silk and her skirt was purple with green embroidery. Beneath it he could see two small red shoes. When she moved, the tinkling of the pearls and jewels made her seem still more beautiful.

Moonbeam came towards him and greeted him rather carelessly. Then she sat down, hiding her pale face behind a gilded fan. Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at her and thought her

more desirable than ever. His eyes sparkled, ~~his mind~~ was troubled, and he found it hard to contain himself. The maid brought tea. Moonbeam drew her sleeve back a little and, with her dainty fingers, offered him a cup. She and her sister Exquisite each took a cup and drank together with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then the cups were removed. She asked him to take off his long gown and go to her room. Hsi-mên summoned Tai An to take his cloak and the boy put it over a chair.

In Moonbeam's room the hangings, curtains and bed-clothes were all of silk. It was a most attractive room and exquisitely perfumed. "Indeed," Hsi-mên said, "this is a dwelling-place for the Immortals to which no mortal man should come."

They talked and laughed together for a while. Then the maid came to set the table. The food was well chosen and well prepared. First they offered him lotus-blossom cakes. Then Moonbeam picked out a mincemeat roll and offered it to him on a golden plate. When the food was done with and everything cleared away, she laid a scarlet cloth on the table and brought out thirty-two ivory pieces and they played dominoes. After the game wine was brought and many fine fruits. The wine was poured into a golden cup and the two sisters offered it to him. Then they took their instruments, Exquisite a guitar, and Moonbeam a lute, and together sang the song: 'Love is in our hearts'. So from exquisite lips came exquisite melody. Their voices would have melted a piece of marble. When the song was over they cast dice. Then Exquisite made a show of going to change her clothes and left Moonbeam alone with Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Hsi-mên took from his sleeve a white silk kerchief in which was wrapped a tiny gold box. Moonbeam thought there were fragrant tea-leaves in it and was going to open it, but Hsi-mên said: "That is not for tea-leaves. It holds my medicine." He took a packet from his sleeve and unfolded it, taking from it a lozenge of fragrant tea which he handed to her. She wished for more and put her hand into his sleeve. She found a purple kerchief with a pair of gold tooth-picks in it. She admired it exceedingly.

"Cassia and Silver Maid have kerchiefs like it," she said. "You must have given them to them."

"Yes," Hsi-mên said, "they were brought from Yang-chou. I don't suppose there is anyone else who could have given them such kerchiefs. Have it if you like it. I will send one for your sister in the morning." He took the wine-cup and drank wine with his medicine. He put his arms round Moonbeam and they drank mouth to mouth. He stroked her breasts. They were small and very soft. He pulled aside her shift. Beneath it her skin was as clear as the whitest jade. His passion was aroused et mentula prompta surrexit. Bracis detractis puellam manum imponere iussit, sed tam magna erat ut timeret. Collum viri brachiis cinxit et "Mel meum," dixit, "hoc primo tempore convenimus. Misericordem te esse oportet et modo dimidium mihi praeberere. Si totum te imposueris, me enecabis. Medicamine tuo talem effecisti; nunquam alio modo tam rubra, tam fervida, tam terribilis esset."

Risit Hsi-mên et "Descende," inquit, "puella, ut quid sapiat ista cognoscas."

"Another time I will do that for you," Moonbeam said, "for we shall meet as often as there are leaves upon the trees, but not to-day, the first time we have come together."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was anxious to begin. Moonbeam asked if he would not have more wine. "It is not wine I want," he said, "but to lie with you."

Moonbeam summoned the maid to clear away the wine-table and take off Hsi-mên's boots. Meanwhile she went to the inner court to take off her clothes and wash herself. When the maid had taken off his boots Hsi-mên gave her a piece of silver, then he got into bed and she lighted some incense. Moonbeam came back and asked if he would like some tea. "It is not tea I want," he said. Then she fastened the door and pulled down the curtains, put the pillow on the bed and joined him there. They were like a pair of love-birds or the phoenix and his mate.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing saw that the girl's skin was smooth and fine, and her queynt dainty and without a hair upon it. It was like a piece of pastry made of the finest flour, tender and delicate and perfectly adorable. He clasped her waist with both his arms. It was as soft as jade and fragrance issued from it. Not for a thousand gold pieces could such perfection have been bought. Crura candida circa se tenuit, fibulam in loco

posuit, ad medium floris amoeni sinum se promovit. Sed penis tam solidus erat ut inire nequiret. Diu laboravit, sed res vix bene successit. Mulier tortis superciliis pulvillum tenet virumque orat up parcat. Sed ille tanto ferocius movetur.

They sported together until the third night-watch. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing went home.

The next day the Moon Lady was sitting in her room with Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus and Picture of Grace. Tai An came and asked for the silk which was to be sent as a present to Magistrate Hsia upon his birthday.

"Yesterday your father called for his sedan-chair," the Moon Lady said. "Where did he go? It was very late when he came back and I suspect he went to Han Tao-kuo's house. You young rascal, you are always trying to throw dust in my eyes when you go off with him on sly expeditions of that sort."

"No," Tai An said, "it was not to Han Tao-kuo's house my father went, for Han has only just come home."

"Where did he go, then?"

Tai An smiled. He made no answer and took away the silk.

"Great Sister," Golden Lotus said, "you will never get the truth out of that young scamp. But I believe the young southerner went with him too. Send for the young southerner. We may get the truth from him."

Ch'un Hung was sent for and Golden Lotus said to him: "Where did you go with your father yesterday? Tell us the truth or the Great Lady will have you beaten."

Ch'un Hung knelt down. "Don't beat me, lady," he said, "I will tell you. Tai An, Ch'in T'ung and I went with Father through a great gateway. We went up several streets and down others, and at last we came to a house where the doors were partly open, protected by sharp-edged bars. Inside the door there stood a very beautiful young lady."

Golden Lotus laughed. "You rascal. Don't you know what a house like that is? Calling a singing-girl a lady too!" Then she asked: "What did the girl look like? Have you ever seen her before?"

"I didn't recognise her," Ch'un Hung said, "She wore a net upon her head just as you ladies do. When we went in, a white-haired old lady came and made reverence to Father. Then we went to the inner court. There was another young

lady there, but she didn't wear a net. Her face was the shape of a melon-seed and her lips were painted very red. She drank wine with Father."

"Where did you go then?" Golden Lotus asked.

"Tai An, Ch'in T'ung and I went to the old lady's room. She gave us wine and cakes."

This amused the Moon Lady and Tower of Jade roared with laughter. They asked him if he knew the second of the two girls.

"She looked like one who was here the other day."

"Ha! Cassia!" Tower of Jade said.

"So he went there, did he?" said the Moon Lady.

"But there is no half-finished gate at our house," Picture of Grace said.

"Perhaps they have built one lately," Golden Lotus suggested.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing returned, he went straight out again to congratulate Magistrate Hsia upon his birthday.

Golden Lotus had a long-haired white cat. It was white all over except for a black streak which went down from its head along its back. It was called 'Coal in the Snow' and sometimes 'Snow Lion'. It could pick up fans and handkerchiefs in its mouth. When Hsi-mên Ch'ing was away Golden Lotus often took it to bed with her. It never made a mess of her clothes. When it was wanted it would come at once, and when it was not wanted, it would go away at once. Sometimes the woman called it 'Snowy Bandit'. It ate not ox-liver or dried fish, but raw meat, and this made it fat and strong. So long was its hair that you could hide an egg in it. Golden Lotus was fond of this cat, and often used to wrap a piece of meat in a red handkerchief and made the cat pounce forward to snatch it.

Kuan Ko had been ill but, after taking old woman Liu's medicine, he improved considerably. The Lady of the Vase dressed him in a red silk shirt and put him on the bed to play. Welcome Spring and the nurse were there, and the nurse was having something to eat. Snow Lion was sitting on the bed. The baby was wearing a red shirt and moving about, and the cat imagined that the red shirt was the handkerchief in which Golden Lotus often wrapped up a piece of meat for him to play with. Suddenly, the cat pounced forward and scratched

the child. The baby gave one shriek and began to choke. Then he had convulsions. The nurse was alarmed, put down the bowl she was holding, and took up the baby. She succeeded in stopping the convulsions, but the cat still came after the baby and tried to scratch him. Welcome Spring drove him away.

Heart's Delight thought that the baby would now be better, but he had one fit after another. She asked Welcome Spring to go at once to the inner court for the Lady of the Vase. When the maid told her mistress what had happened the Lady of the Vase was terribly upset. The Moon Lady ran with her to her room. Kuan Ko's eyes were turned so that the pupils could not be seen. There was foam on his lips and the only sound he made was like the whimpering of a young chicken. His hands and feet were trembling.

The Lady of the Vase felt as if her heart had been cut by a knife. She rocked the child in her arms and kissed him. "Oh, baby," she cried, "you were so well when I went to the inner court. What has made you have a fit like this?" Welcome Spring and Heart's Delight told her about the cat. The Lady of the Vase wept more bitterly than before. "Baby," she said, "nobody has loved you and now you have fallen into this trap."

When the Moon Lady heard this she said nothing, but sent for Golden Lotus and asked her whether it was her cat that had frightened the baby.

"Who said it was my cat?" Golden Lotus said.

The Moon Lady pointed to the nurse and Welcome Spring. "They said so," she said.

"Then they have too much to say," Golden Lotus cried. "My cat is asleep in my room. How can it have frightened the baby? What right have they to say such a thing? Just as, when they take a melon, they always pick out the soft spot, so, whenever anything goes wrong, the blame is put down to me."

"How did the cat get in here?" the Moon Lady said.

"It often comes," Welcome Spring told her.

"Then why hasn't it scratched the baby before?" Golden Lotus cried. "As for you, young woman, don't goggle at me like that. Don't raise your eyebrows and don't have so much to say. Oh, I never have any luck." She went angrily to her own room.

Golden Lotus had secretly trained her cat with intent to kill the baby. If the child died, she hoped to win back Hsi-mên Ch'ing. It was the same story as that very old one in which T'u An-ku trained a dog to kill Chao Tun, the minister.

When the Moon Lady and the others saw the child in such a state they poured ginger broth down his throat and sent Lai An for old woman Liu. The old woman came and felt the baby's pulse. She tapped her foot upon the floor and said: "This is serious. I fear the child will die." She hastily made a decoction of peppermint and golden lotus, then she produced a ball of gold foil, pounded her decoction in a cup, and filled the gold foil with it. The Moon Lady took a golden pin to open the baby's mouth. It was tightly closed but they got the medicine down his throat. "If that cures him, well and good," said the old woman. "If it doesn't, I fear we shall have to cauterise."

"We can't decide that," the Moon Lady said. "We shall have to wait until his father comes home or he will be angry."

"Mother," the Lady of the Vase cried, "we must save the child's life. If we wait it may be too late. If Father scolds us I will take all the blame."

"Well," the Moon Lady said, "it is your boy. I will leave it to you, for I dare not take the responsibility."

Old woman Liu cauterised the baby in five places, between his brows, on his neck, on both wrists and on his breast. Then he seemed to go to sleep. In the evening, when Hsi-mên Ch'ing arrived, he had not awakened. When the old woman knew that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had come, she took five ch'ien of silver from the Moon Lady and slipped away by a back door. Hsi-mên came to the Moon Lady's room and she told him all about the child. He hurried to the Lady of the Vase's room. Her eyes were very red. "What has made the boy ill?" Hsi-mên asked her. She only wept and made no answer. Then he asked the maid and the nurse, but they dared not tell him. He noticed that the child's hands were scratched and that he was burned in several places. He rushed back to question the Moon Lady. She could keep silence no longer and told him about the cat. "Old woman Liu declared that the boy had been terrified," she said, "and that the only thing to do was to use the needle and cauterise him. She was afraid it would be too late if we

waited for you. Since then the child has slept. He has not waked at all."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing flew into a furious rage. He dashed to Golden Lotus's room and, without a word, took the cat by the legs and dashed out its brains on the stone flags underneath the eaves. There was a crash. The cat's brain was scattered like ten thousand peach blossoms, and its teeth like broken jade.

When Golden Lotus saw her cat destroyed, she sat on her bed and did not move. "You thief," she muttered as Hsi-mên Ch'ing went away, "taking people's property and killing it. That's the sort of hero you are. All this fuss about a cat. Of course, the cat won't demand its life at your hands when it meets you in Hades! You treacherous villain! you changeable creature! You will come to a bad end."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the Sixth Lady's room. "You were looking after the baby," he said to Heart's Delight and Welcome Spring. "How came it that you allowed the cat to frighten and scratch him? Then you listened to old woman Liu and allowed her to burn the child. If he gets better, well and good. But if he doesn't, that old whore shall go to the courts and I'll have the screws on her."

"What would you have done," the Lady of the Vase said, "if you had thought the baby was at the point of death? Doctors only do the best they can to help people."

The Lady of the Vase had hoped that after the operation the child would be better, but the only result was to drive the trouble further in. The convulsions developed into a slow fit. The child's water and motions issued freely and were strangely coloured. His eyes opened and closed convulsively; he dozed, and took no food all day. In a terrible state of anxiety, the Lady of the Vase consulted fortune-tellers, but the omens were all unfavourable. The Moon Lady, without Hsi-mên Ch'ing's knowledge, again sent for old woman Liu to come and work a charm. Then they sent for a doctor who specialised in children's ailments. He proposed to blow some powder into the baby's nostrils. "If the child sneezes," he said, "well and good, but if he doesn't, I fear there is no hope." They blew the powder into the child's nostrils but nothing happened. Not once did he sneeze. The Lady of the Vase gazed and gazed at the child all

day and all night. She never dried her tears and she never wished to eat or drink.

The fifteenth day of the eighth month was the Moon Lady's birthday, but she would not keep it. Her relatives sent presents but no invitations were sent to them. Only Aunt Wu, Aunt Yang and the two nuns came. The two nuns had not shared the money equally and they were not on the best of terms.

On the fourteenth, Pên IV and Nun Hsüeh went to the printer's and brought back with them fifteen hundred copies of the texts. The Lady of the Vase gave him a string of coppers to buy paper offerings, incense, and candles, and, on the fifteenth, he went with Ch'ên Ching-chi to the temple, burned the paper, offerings and the incense, and distributed the scriptures. Then he returned and told the Lady of the Vase what he had done. Every day the Ch'iao family sent old woman K'ung to see Kuan Ko. They recommended a certain Dr. Pao of the Imperial College of Medicine, who was a specialist in children's diseases. When he came he called the illness by a long name and said that it was hopeless. They gave him five ch'ien of silver and dismissed him. Then they tried to pour some medicine down the baby's throat, but he rejected it. He closed his eyes, clenched his teeth and made a gurgling noise. All night through the Lady of the Vase never took off her clothes. She carried the baby in her arms, crying all the time. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, except for his duty at the office, never went out, and, whenever he came back from the office, he went at once to see his son.

One night at the end of the eighth month the Lady of the Vase was lying on the bed with Kuan Ko in her arms. A single lamp was burning on the table and the maids and the nurse were sound asleep. She looked at the window. The moonbeams shone through it and she could hear the mournful sound of the night-watchman. To her sad heart it sounded like ten thousand knockings; her grief was beyond expression.

The Milky Way is still, is still.

The stars are far, are far away.

The gleaming moon casts her cool beams through the window

And the cold night breeze drives through the door.

On the watch tower the drum beats quickly

One watch and then another.

In someone's house, on a cold anvil
 A thousand strokes, and then again a thousand strokes.
 The house bell rings under the painted eaves
 It breaks the grieving woman's heart.
 The lamp, burning on its silver stand,
 Serves but to point out her unending sorrow.
 One thought alone is in that heart
 The longing for her child's recovery. •

The Lady of the Vase lay on her bed half sleeping, half waking. She dreamed that her old husband Hua Tzū-hsü came to her door, wearing white, and looking as he had looked in life. "Strumpet," he said harshly, "what right had you to steal my wealth and give it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing? At this moment I go to accuse you." The Lady of the Vase seized him by the sleeve. "Good Brother," she pleaded, "be merciful." But Hua Tzū-hsü escaped from her. She woke to find her hand grasping Kuan Ko's sleeve and knew it was a dream. "Strange! Strange!" she gasped. She heard the drum sounding the third night-watch. Her hair was standing on end and her body was bathed in a cold sweat. •

The next day when Hsi-mên Ch'ing came, she told him of her dream. "Where he is now we do not know," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "It was only your fancy. Try and be calm and do not worry so much. I will get Silver Maid to come and stay with you, and old woman Fêng to come and wait on you." Tai An was sent to bring Silver Maid.

That afternoon Kuan Ko, lying upon his nurse's breast, seemed hardly able to breathe. Heart's Delight was frightened. She called the Lady of the Vase. "Mother," she cried, "look at the baby. His eyes are upturned and he seems able only to breathe out, not in." The Lady of the Vase took the child from her, weeping. She told the maid to go at once for Hsi-mên Ch'ing and tell him that the baby was dying.

Ch'ang Chih-chieh was there, telling Hsi-mên Ch'ing how he had found a house with four rooms and needed thirty-five taels more. When Hsi-mên heard how ill his son was, he said to Ch'ang Chih-chieh: "You must go now. I cannot take you to the gate. I will send you the money and come to see you in your new house." He hurried to see the Lady of the Vase. The Moon Lady and the other ladies were already there,

watching the child struggling in the last agony. Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not bear to look. He went into another room, sat down on a chair, and sighed deeply. Before he had time to drink half a cup of tea, Kuan Ko died. It was between three and four in the afternoon of the twenty-third day of the eighth month. The boy had lived fourteen months.

They all set up a great crying. The Lady of the Vase beat her ears, tore her cheeks, and dashed her head upon the ground. Then, with a terrible cry, she swooned away. For a long time she stayed unconscious, then she came to herself and rocked the dead child in her arms, sobbing.

"Little star of my life," she cried, "my heart is broken. Why could I not die with you? I do not wish to live alone in this world. Why have you left me so cruelly?"

Heart's Delight and Welcome Spring cried bitterly. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told some of the boys to prepare a room at the side of the great hall, and was going to put the child upon his bed on two benches there, but the Lady of the Vase clung to him with both hands and would not let him go. "My precious baby," she cried, "you have taken my heart with you. Now all my labour is wasted. I can never see you more."

The Moon Lady and the others cried with her and tried to console her. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, when he saw her torn face and her hair in disorder, said: "Do not take it so hard. He was not fated to be our child. We reared him for a spell but now his little life is done. Cry and be done with it. We cannot bring him back to life by weeping. Remember that you are dear to me. Now we must take him away and I must send for the Master of the Yin Yang." He asked what the time was and the Moon Lady told him.

"As I thought," Tower of Jade said, "he waited for this hour and then went. At this hour he was born and at this hour he has died. It was the twenty-third day too, only the month is different. He has lived one year and two months exactly."

When the Lady of the Vase saw the boys waiting to take the body of her child away, she began to cry again. "Oh, why must you be in such a hurry? Great Mother, put your hand upon him. He is still warm. Oh, my son! How can I give you up? You cannot leave me so cruelly." Again she threw herself upon the ground and sobbed bitterly.

The boys took Kuan Ko and laid him in the room they had prepared. The Moon Lady said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "We must let our relatives the Ch'iaos know, and send for the priests."

"We will send for the priests to-morrow," Hsi-mên said. He sent Tai An to bear the news to Master Ch'iao. Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, was summoned to write the certificate. Pên IV was given ten taels of silver and told to buy a set of fir-wood boards and get the carpenters to make a little coffin for the child.

As soon as the Ch'iaos got the message, Mistress Ch'iao came. She cried. The Moon Lady and the others cried with her and told her all that had happened. Then Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, came. "My young brother," he said, "departed this life exactly at the hour of the monkey." The Moon Lady told him to look at the black book. Master Hsü took up his secret book of magic and read:

The young master was born at the hour of the monkey on the twenty-third day of the sixth month of the year *Ping Shên* in the reign *Chêng Ho*, and died at the hour of the monkey on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the year *Ting Yu* of the same reign. This combination of a *Jên Tzũ* day and a *Ting Yu* month indicates that another life and death are before him. We must have no mourners except the relatives, and, when he is put into the coffin, no one who was born under the sign of the Snake, the Dragon, the Rat or the Hare, must be present. It says in my black book that one who dies on a *Jên Tzũ* day will go upwards to the Temple of the Precious Vase, or down to Ch'i (Shantung). In his previous existence he was a scion of the house of Ts'ai in Yen-chou. He extorted money from people by violence and spent his substance in wild living. He paid no worship to Heaven and Earth and was lacking in due reverence for his kinsmen. He caught a chill, took to his bed, fouled his bed-clothes, and died. He was born again, suffered from convulsions, and, ten days ago, some animal terrified him. On that day his evil star was in the ascendant; his spirit was taken from him. On that day, too, he was born again in a family named Wang. He will grow to be a military officer and live to be sixty-eight years old.

This was what Master Hsü found in his book. He asked whether Hsi-mên Ch'ing intended to bury or burn the body the following day.

"I do not wish him to be taken from here to-morrow," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I will have the appropriate ceremonies on the third day and he shall be buried in my family sepulchre, on the fifth day after his death."

"The twenty-seventh will be *Ping Ch'ên* and not inauspicious so far as the members of your household are concerned," the Master of the Yin Yang said. "The burial should take place at noon." He wrote a certificate and the child was placed in the coffin. It was the third night-watch. The Lady of the Vase went to her room and, weeping, gathered together some of the child's tiny religious garments and put them, with hat, shoes, and socks, into the coffin with him. It was nailed up. Everybody began to cry again. The Master of the Yin Yang went away.

The next day Hsi-mên Ch'ing was too busy to go to the office. Hsia heard of his bereavement and came to offer his condolences. Hsi-mên sent a man to give the news to Abbot Wu and ask him to send eight priests to sing a dirge on the third day after the decease. The Abbot and Master Ch'iao both offered the customary offering of three animals. The four uncles, Wu, Shên, Han, and Hua, did likewise and came to burn paper offerings. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Master Wên, Ch'ang Chih-chieh, Han Tao-kuo, Kan, Pên IV, Li and Huang, all made contributions and came in the evening to watch before the body with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. When the monks had performed their part and had gone away, the customary offerings were made before the baby's coffin. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had tables set in the great hall for the entertainment of those who had come to condole with him.

Cassia, Silver Maid, and Moonbeam sent offerings.

The Lady of the Vase, thinking always of her child, was very sad. She would take nothing to eat and cried so much that she lost her voice. Indeed Hsi-mên Ch'ing was afraid she might try to kill herself, and told the nurse, the maids, and Silver Maid to stay with her all day. He himself spent three nights with her and did all he could to console her. Nun Hsüeh read the *Lêng Yen* sutra to her and an exorcism for

freeing the troubled spirit, and tried to persuade her to stop crying. "This was not really your child," she said. "He was one to whom you were beholden in a former existence. We read in the T'o-lo scripture of a woman who bore three children, all of whom died before they were two years old. She cried as she took the last dead baby to the river's bank, and could not bear to cast it in. Then the Blessed One took the form of a monk and said to her: 'You should not so bewail. This is not your child, but one who was your enemy in your last life. Three times he has come to you to try to bring about your death. If you do not believe me, here is proof.' The Blessed One pointed at the baby and it appeared in devil's form. Standing on the water, the devil cried to the woman: 'Because you have read the T'o-lo scriptures with devotion, angels have watched over you day and night and I have had no chance to kill you. Now the Blessed One has changed my heart and I will be your enemy no longer.' So saying, he sank beneath the waters and disappeared. I assure you, this baby must have been your enemy. He came to you to be an expense and a hurt to your body. The other day you gave fifteen hundred copies of the T'o-lo scriptures to be distributed, so establishing yourself in virtue, and, thereafter he could no longer endure to be with you and so died. Now you will have a child who will be your true child."

The Lady of the Vase listened but she did not forget Kuan Ko. Whenever the baby's name was mentioned she wept.

Five days passed. On the morning of the twenty-seventh, eight small boys wearing black gowns and white hats carried banners, white parasols, white flowers and willows, and walked before the coffin of scarlet and gold. A great red scroll was borne beneath a canopy and on it was inscribed: 'The Coffin of a son of the house of Hsi-mên.' Abbot Wu had sent twelve Taoist novices in black robes. They chanted exorcisms about the coffin. Musicians played mournful tunes. Then came all the relatives and Hsi-mên Ch'ing dressed in plain clothes. They went on foot to the end of the street, near the city gate, and there got into carriages and mounted horses.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing feared that the Lady of the Vase would cry if she went to the grave with them, so he would not let her go, but all the other ladies went in sedan-chairs. Beauty

of the Snow and Silver Maid stayed at home to keep company with the Lady of the Vase. She, forbidden to go to the grave, went after the coffin to the gate. There she cried: "Oh, baby, you have broken my heart," and fell swooning. As she fell, her head struck the gate; her cheeks were bruised, and the golden pins fell out of her hair. Beauty of the Snow and Silver Maid went forward and lifted her up. They took her to her own room. There she saw the lonely bed with the little drum shaped like the God of Longevity lying upon it. This reminded her again of her lost child. She beat her hands upon the table and sobbed bitterly.

Silver Maid grasped her hands. "Mother," she said, "please don't cry any more. The baby has gone and cannot come back to you however much you cry. You must console yourself. Don't be so sad."

Beauty of the Snow said: "You are still young and you will certainly have another child. I must not say all I think, because, in this place, there are holes in the wall and eyes to look through them, but it was she who schemed for this and she will pay for it. It was she who killed the baby and the baby will demand his life from her. You and I have had much to suffer. She wants her husband all to herself and, whenever he goes to anyone else, she is very angry. You know that our husband has not been to me for a long time. Well, the other day he did come, and you saw what a fuss she made about it and what she said about me to his daughter. I say nothing, but I keep my eyes open and watch. We shall see to what sort of an end that strumpet comes."

"Yes," said the Lady of the Vase, "she has made me suffer. But I do not know when I shall die. It may be to-day or it may be to-morrow and I cannot make trouble with her. I can only leave her to go her own way."

The nurse Heart's Delight came in. She knelt down and said: "There is something I must say to you. I have not dared to do so before. The baby is dead and that is bad luck for me. I am afraid his Lordship and the Great Lady will send me away. My husband is dead and I have nowhere to go."

The Lady of the Vase was distressed again. "The baby is dead," she said, "but I am still alive. And even if I should die to-morrow, you have served me well. I am sure they will not

send you away. One of these days the Great Lady may have a boy or a girl. They will let you be his nurse, and it will be all the same for you. There is no cause for you to worry."

This satisfied Heart's Delight.

The Lady of the Vase began to cry again. Silver Maid and Beauty of the Snow did their best to console her and tried to get her to eat something. They asked Welcome Spring to go to the inner court and bring some food. But when it was set upon the table the Lady of the Vase could not bring herself to eat any. She tried a few mouthfuls and then gave up the attempt.

When the funeral procession came to the grave, Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Master Hsü to determine the site. Kuan Ko was buried beside the tomb of Hsi-mên's first wife, the lady Ch'ên.

Master Ch'iao and the other relatives made offerings at the tomb and were entertained in the new harbour. When they returned, the Lady of the Vase came to kotow to the Moon Lady, Mistress Ch'iao and Uncle Wu. Again she wept. "Lady," she said to Mistress Ch'iao, "who could have such evil fortune as myself whose baby has died so young? Your daughter is widowed before her marriage, and all that we have done for them is thrown away. I trust you will not scorn me now."

"Lady," Mistress Ch'iao said, "you must not talk like that. We can never be sure how long anyone will live. There is an old saying that those who have arranged an alliance between their families can never cease to be friends. You are not old. You will very likely bear another child. We must be patient and not give way to melancholy." Mistress Ch'iao went home.

In the hall, Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, to purify the house. They hung yellow paper charms over all the doors to drive away evil spirits. The charms said: "The spirit of our departed one is thirty feet high. It goes towards the north-east. If it meets the god of the day, it will return and not go forth again. Or it will destroy it and all will be well. The relatives will have nothing to fear."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave a roll of cloth and two taels of silver

to Master Hsü and took him to the gate. That evening he went to the Lady of the Vase's room and tried to comfort her. He was afraid she would be sad if she saw the baby's toys, so he told Welcome Spring to put them all away.

THE OPENING OF THE NEW SHOP

AFTER Kuan Ko's death, Golden Lotus was as pleased as could be. She would say, pretending to scold her maids: "Ha, you strumpet! You thought you were like the sun at its zenith, but now you are brought low. Now you are like a turtle-dove brought down by the bow, stretching out its tongue in vain. You are like a chair without a back and nothing to lean upon. You are another old woman Wang, who sold her corn and can never have it again to grind, or an old procuress whose singing-girls are dead who has no one else to depend upon. Yes, we are now on the same footing again."

The Lady of the Vase in her room could hear all this. She said nothing, but her tears flowed faster. With the anger in her heart and her great grief, her spirit drooped more and more and she had no peace even in her dreams. Her appetite decreased day by day. On the second day after Kuan Ko's funeral, Silver Maid went away.

Old woman Fêng brought a maid, thirteen years old, and sold her to Beauty of the Snow for five taels of silver. She was given the name Kingfisher.

The Lady of the Vase never ceased to think of her baby and there was a furious hatred within her for Golden Lotus. So her old illness returned; she had a continual issue of blood. Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent for Dr Jên, but his medicine did her no good. It was like watering a rock; the more medicine she took, the worse she became. In less than a fortnight, she grew very ill and thin. All her beauty and charm left her and she looked like a handful of bones. Her sorrow was too great for her to bear.

One day, at the beginning of the ninth month, it was cold and the west wind blew chill. She was in her room alone. The bed was cold: the lonely moon cast its beams upon the window. She was thinking of her baby and sighed deeply several times. Suddenly she seemed to hear someone tapping on the window. She called her maid, but the maids were sleeping soundly and there was no reply. She rose from her

bed, put on her shoes and an embroidered gown, went to the door, opened it and looked out. Hua Tzŭ-hsü was there with Kuan Kō in his arms. He told her that he had a new house and asked her to go with him. But she would not leave Hsi-mên Ch'ing. She refused him and tried to take the child from him. He pushed her and made her fall upon the ground. Then she woke up and found it was a dream. Her body was bathed in sweat and she sobbed till dawn.

About this time, the merchandise which Lai Pao had bought in Nan-ching, arrived. Lai Pao sent Wang Hsien before him to get the money to pay the duty. Hsi-mên Ch'ing wrote a letter and sent it to Jung Hai with a hundred taels of silver. He sent presents of wine, silk, and other things to the customs-officer asking that, when the merchandise was checked, a lenient reckoning might be made. The shop was ready, and it was arranged that it should be opened on the fourth day of the ninth month. On that day the merchandise was brought, twenty large loads of it. Kinsmen and friends sent presents and scrolls to be hung up in the new shop, and there were twenty guests or more. Magistrate Hsia sent a man with gifts and red favours; Master Ch'iao sent twelve musicians. Hsi-mên Ch'ing himself engaged Li Ming, Wu Hui and Chêng Ch'un. The two clerks, Kan and Han, were in the shop, one to check and test the silver, the other to determine the price of the goods. Ts'ui Pên received the goods and set them in their proper place. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, in his ceremonial dress, burned paper offerings; then the relatives and friends offered the presents they had brought. Fifteen tables were laid in the hall. There was an abundance of food and, when all had taken their places, the musicians began to play. Everybody seemed to be present and the seats were all occupied. The three singers sang the song of the World's Beginning; the wine was passed round several times, and several courses of food were served. The musicians played and those in the company urged each other to drink. Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta took the largest cups. They did not stop drinking till sunset. Then the guests departed, but Hsi-mên Ch'ing urged Uncle Wu, Uncle Shên, Uncle Han, Master Wên, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta to stay. The tables were re-laid.

and they sat down again. This was the first day the shop had been open, and, when the clerks reckoned up, they found they had done business to the value of more than five hundred taels of silver. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted. When the shop had been closed, he invited Kan, Han and Fu with Ts'ui Pên, Pên IV and Ch'ên Ching-chi to join their party. When the musicians had finished playing they were dismissed. Only the three singers remained to sing for them.

Ying Po-chüeh was drunk. He went to the front to wash his hands. Then he said to Li Ming: "Who is that good-looking young singer with his hair in a knot?"

"Uncle," Li Ming said, "don't you know him? That is Chêng Fêng's younger brother, Chêng Ch'un. A few days ago, his Lordship had a party with Moonbeam at Chêng's house."

"Ah," Po-chüeh said, "now I understand why she was at the funeral the other day." He went back to join Hsi-mên Ch'ing and the others.

"I see I have to congratulate you on a new brother-in-law," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Don't talk nonsense," he said. He told Wang Ching to give Po-chüeh a large cup of wine.

"What do you think about it, venerable Uncle?" Po-chüeh said to Uncle Wu. "Don't you think he is punishing me without due cause?"

"I am punishing you, you dog, because of the lies you tell," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Ying Po-chüeh bent his head, considered for a while and said: "Very well, I will drink it. I don't suppose it will kill me. But I never drink without music. Kindly tell Chêng Ch'un to sing me a song."

The three boys came in together. Po-chüeh said to Li Ming: "You and Wu Hui can go away. I only want Chêng Ch'un. I want him to play the guitar and sing a song for me."

Hsieh Hsi-ta said to Chêng Ch'un: "Come and sing for your Uncle Ying."

"Beggar Ying," said Hsi-mên, "please understand that you will have to drink a cup of wine for every song he sings." He told Tai An to set two great silver cups before Po-chüeh. Chêng Ch'un took up his guitar and sang.

THE GOLDEN LOTUS

A girl of sixteen years or so
 Watching a pair of butterflies at play,
 On the white wall rested her dainty shoulders
 And dried her tears with tender fingers.
 To her slave she said
 Drive them away and make them play elsewhere.

When Chêng Ch'un had finished his song he invited Ying Po-chüeh to drink. Po-chüeh did so. Tai An quickly refilled his cup. Chêng Ch'un began again.

He passed beyond the sculptured screen and came to her
 Leaning against the arbour of wild roses.
 Shyly she pretended to put straight her phoenix pins.
 She would not speak of what had passed the night before,
 But smiled and gathered flowers to cast at him.

Po-chüeh drank another cup of wine. Then he turned to Hsieh Hsi-ta. "This is too much for me," he said. "Two great cups of wine are more than I can manage."

"What, you foolish beggar!" Hsieh Hsi-ta said. "When you can't drink, you would make me drink for you? I am not your slave."

"Foolish beggar yourself," Po-chüeh said. "When one of these days I get an official position, you certainly will be my slave."

"Oh, you dog," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "the only appointment you'll ever get will be that of musician in a brothel."

"Well, my boy," Po-chüeh said, "if I am you shall have the hall."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. He said to Tai An: "Go and fetch the knuckle-cracker and crack this rascally beggar's knuckles."

Hsieh Hsi-ta went quietly over and tapped Po-chüeh on the head. "Beggar," he said, "Master Wên is here, yet you talk all this nonsense."

"Master Wên is a man of learning," Po-chüeh said. "He won't mind our being frivolous."

"You two gentlemen are my patron's very good friends," Master Wên said. "It is right and fitting that you should behave like this when drinking wine. Otherwise, enjoyment never could reach the pitch we desire. Happiness is in our

hearts but it demands expression, and, when it is expressed, it is natural that we should let go a little."

Uncle Shên said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Now let us try something else. Allow us to have a game of some sort—dice, or guessing fingers, or dominoes, and then a poem or a song or a tongue-twister. He who fails must drink. That is fair, and there will be no disputes."

"An excellent idea!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He poured a cup of wine, set it before Uncle Wu and asked him to begin.

Uncle Wu took up the dice-box and said: "Gentlemen, I will begin, and after me, everyone in turn. I must have the name of a flower to correspond to the markings of the dice. The first word of the second sentence must be the same as the last word of the first. It must be a quotation from a song or a poem. He who fails must drink a large cup of wine. Here goes: I cast the first and get one point red. The red plum blossoms stand beside the white plum blossoms."

Uncle Wu cast the dice and got a two. He drank a cup of wine and passed the box to Uncle Shên.

"For the second cast: upon one stem I see two lotus blossoms. 'The lotus blossoms are the delight of the gaily coloured mandarin ducks.'"

He threw a two, drank two cups of wine and passed the dice to Uncle Han.

"For the third cast," said Uncle Han, "I have three spring plums. 'The plums fall, but I do not put straight my hat.'"

He cast the dice but did not say what turned up. Then he drank his wine and gave the box to Master Wên.

"The fourth cast makes the *Chuang Yüan* red," said Master Wên. "'Red and purple are not the wear for common men.'"

Master Wên drank a cup of wine. It was Ying Po-chüeh's turn. "I can't read a word," Po-chüeh said. "You will get no quotation from me. I shall have to give you a tongue-twister."

Flip-flop, flip-flop, a fast-footed old fellow
Bearing beans by the bushel in his right hand
And a beggar's broad begging bag firm in his left
Scuffled steadily straight to his front.
A mangy mongrel, all yellow and white
Bit the beggar's broad begging bag.
Flip-flop, flip-flop, the fast-footed old fellow

Dropped the basket with the bushel of beans
Strove stoutly to stampede the mangy mongrel all yellow and
white

But who can say whether he beat the dog, or the dog beat him?

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "You boil-breaking, mad creature!" he said. "Have you ever seen a man drive off a dog with his fist?"

"Well, he shouldn't have gone out without a stick. Nowadays, all beggars take sticks with them. That's the only way they can deal with the dogs."

"Sir," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "Beggar Ying is speaking for himself. He is the beggar here."

"We shall have to punish him," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "He hasn't played the game properly. Now, friend Hsieh, it is your turn."

"I will give you a better tongue-twister than his," Hsieh Hsi-ta said.

On the wall there is a bit of broken brick.

Beside the wall there is a horse.

If the bit of broken brick falls on the horse

Will the bit of broken brick break the horse's back,

Or will the horse break the bit of broken brick?

"You said mine was no good," Po-chüeh said. "Do you flatter yourself that your 'bit of broken brick' was any better? If you ask me, your wife is that horse and I the bit of broken brick. I and your wife would make a fine pair. It would be a case of a skinny donkey going round a broken millstone."

"Your wife, the old whore," said Hsieh Hsi-ta, "has only black beans to feed the pigs with. If she offered them to a dog, the dog would refuse them."

They joked with one another and each filled up his own cup. It was Han Tao-kuo's turn. "Master, you are here," Han Tao-kuo said. "How dare I go before you?"

"Don't stand on ceremony," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him. "We must follow the order of the game." Han Tao-kuo said:

"The fifth cast gives the winter plums. 'Among the plums, I meet an angel.'"

Then it was Hsi-mên's turn. "I will throw a six," he said.

"The sixth cast fills the sky with stars. 'The stars are cold: the dark green waters mirror them.'"

Hsi-mên did throw a six. Ying Po-chüeh said: "I am sure promotion will come to you this winter. Fortune will turn your way." He filled a cup for Hsi-mên.

Li Ming and the other singers came and sang for them. The party did not break up until the night-watch had sounded. Hsi-mên Ch'ing dismissed the boys, watched the servants clear everything away, and told the four clerks to take charge in turn and see carefully to the doors and windows. Then he went home.

The next day, Ying Po-chüeh came with Li and Huang to make a settlement of their debt. They said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "So far we have only got back fourteen hundred and fifty taels. That is not enough to cover the expenses; we can only offer his Lordship three hundred and fifty. When we receive the next payment from the authorities, we will pay the remainder." Po-chüeh spoke on their behalf, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'ên Ching-chi to weigh the money and accept it.

Huang and Li then went away, leaving the money on the table. Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Ying Po-chüeh: "Brother Ch'ang told me that he had got a house. He wants thirty-five taels. He came the other day but I could not attend to him because the baby was ill. I don't know whether he mentioned the matter to you or not."

"I told him he had no business to worry you when your little son was ill," Po-chüeh said. "I said you couldn't be expected to discuss matters of that sort when you were so terribly anxious. 'Keep the landlord quiet,' I said to him, 'and I will see our brother and get it fixed up for you.'"

"We will have something to eat and then you can take him fifty taels," Hsi-mên said. "This is an auspicious day and he can settle the matter now. Tell him to spend anything that is left over on setting up a small shop so that he can make a little money for himself. That ought to be enough for his wife and himself."

Po-chüeh thanked him. Food was brought and they ate it together. Afterwards, Hsi-mên told Po-chüeh that he would not detain him, and asked him to go and arrange about Ch'ang's house.

"I should like one of your servants to go with me," Ying Po-chüeh said.

"Nonsense," said Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "Put the money in your sleeve and take it to him. That's all that's necessary."

"I don't mean that," Po-chüeh said, "but I have other matters to attend to. It is my cousin Tu's birthday. I sent him a present this morning and he sent a boy to ask me to go and see him this afternoon. I shan't be able to come back and report to you. If you will let one of your boys come with me, he can come and tell you when we have arranged about the house."

"Wang Ching shall go with you," Hsi-mên said.

Wang Ching went with Po-chüeh to see Ch'ang Chih-chieh. Ch'ang was at home and invited Po-chüeh to go in. Po-chüeh showed him the money. "His Lordship," he said, "told me to come and arrange with you about the house. I am very busy and have to go and see my cousin Tu. Let us get the matter settled quickly. Then I must go."

Ch'ang Chih-chieh hastily told his wife to make some tea. "His Lordship is really very kind," he said. "I can't think of anyone else who would have done it." They drank their tea and went to New Market Street. There they signed the contract and paid the landlord. Po-chüeh told Wang Ching to go home and report to his master; then he gave the remaining silver to Ch'ang Chih-chieh and went to see his cousin. Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at the contract and told Wang Ching to take it back to Ch'ang Chih-chieh.

Chapter Sixty-one

THE LADY OF THE VASE FALLS ILL

The cricket chirps mournfully in the dew
It frightens her as she lies on the autumn pillow.
Her tears moisten the embroidered coverlets.
Lonely she lies, her exquisite limbs are cold.
The night seems as unending as her sorrow.
The rain pours down. The lamp is very dim.
She cannot sleep.
Now the crow cries and the golden pit is cold.

ONE night, when Han Tao-kuo was at home from the shop, his wife Porphyry said to him: "Through our master's kindness we have made a good deal of money. I think we ought to prepare some sort of a feast and invite him to come. Besides, he has just lost his son and we should do something to console him. It need not be a very expensive entertainment, but it should be well done. When the people at the shop see it, they will realise that you are on very good terms with his Lordship. Such friendships as that between our master and yourself are not by any means usual. It will help when you go to the South."

"That is just what I have been thinking," Han Tao-kuo said. "To-morrow is the fifth, but that is not a favourable day. Why shouldn't we give our party on the sixth? I will engage two singing-girls and take my card round myself and ask him to come. At night I will go and sleep at the shop."

"Why should you engage singing-girls?" Porphyry said. "After dinner, he may wish to stay a while and it will be awkward if there are singing-girls about. Our neighbour, Mistress Lo, knows a girl called Shên. She is young and has an excellent voice. She has the advantage of being blind. We might get her to come. We can send her away when we have done with her."

Han Tao-kuo agreed. The night passed. The next day he went to the shop and asked Master Wên to write an invitation card for him. Then he went himself to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "To-morrow," he said, "I am arranging to have a very small

party and I beg you to come." He handed his card to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên looked at it.

"You should not take so much trouble," he said. "I shall be free to-morrow and I will come as soon as I get back from the office." Han Tao-kuo went away. The next morning, he sent Hu Hsiu to buy food and engaged a cook. He sent a sedan-chair for Miss Shên. His wife and the maids prepared some excellent tea and waited for Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

In the afternoon, Ch'in T'ung brought a jar of grape wine and, later, Hsi-mên Ch'ing came in a sedan-chair, followed by Tai An and Wang Ching. He was wearing a *chung ching* hat, a black silk gown, and black shoes with white soles. Han Tao-kuo welcomed him and thanked him for the wine. Hsi-mên sat down on a chair which was set by itself in the place of honour. Porphyry, in a dainty dress, came and kotowed four times to him. Then she went out to see about the tea. Wang Ching brought it and Han Tao-kuo offered a cup to Hsi-mên; then he sat down and took a cup himself. When they had drunk their tea Wang Ching took the cups away.

"Both when I have been here and when I have been away," Han Tao-kuo said, "you have been very kind to me and my wife. I find it hard to express my gratitude. The other day, when your son died, I was not at home, and, unfortunately, my wife had a very bad cold and could not call to offer our sympathy. We have ventured to invite you to-day, partly in the hope of making you merry and partly as a sign of our sincere sympathy."

"You are both very kind," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Porphyry came and sat with them. "Have you told his Lordship?" she asked her husband.

"Not yet," he said.

"What is that?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"He was going to ask two singing-girls to come, but I thought they might be in the way and I wouldn't let him send for them. We know a young lady who often visits my neighbour Lo, a certain Miss Shên. She knows all the latest songs. The other day, when I was at your house, I saw Miss Yü. She sings well, but not so well as Miss Shên. I have asked Miss Shên to come and sing for you. If you like her singing, you may think fit to get her to sing for your ladies."

Han Tao-kuo told Tai An to take his master's cloak, and the table was laid. Hu Hsiu brought in the food. Porphyry opened the jar and heated the wine. She carried the pot and her husband offered a cup of wine to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then Miss Shên came. Her hair was dressed high upon her head, and the ornaments and flowers she wore were very simple. Her gown was green, her skirt red. Her feet were very small. Her cheeks were the colour of peach flowers, and her eyebrows long. She kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He bade her rise and asked how old she was.

"I am twenty-one," she said.

"How many songs do you know?" Hsi-mên asked.

"More than a hundred; some long, some short."

Hsi-mên asked Han Tao-kuo to give her a seat, and, after making a reverence, she sat down. Then she took a guitar and sang: 'The Arbour of Fragrance in Autumn.' When they had finished their soup and other dishes had been brought, she sang: 'The Five Thousand Rebels.' They drank again, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked her to put down the guitar and sing a short song to the accompaniment of the lute. Miss Shên was anxious to display her skill. Gently waving her silken sleeves, she took up the lute delicately, tuned it softly, and sang. The song she sang was 'Sheep upon the Mountains.' Han Tao-kuo asked his wife to fill up a cup of wine and offer it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Porphyry said to Miss Shên: "You know another fine song. I should like you to sing it for his Lordship."

At the first meeting with her lover
No more than twice ten springs had welcomed her.
Black is her hair like a black cloud
Her cheeks as rosy as a peach blossom
As tender as the soft shoots of the bamboo.
If she had been born of a good family
She would have been a great lady.
Alas, she has thrown away her virtue in a house of ill fame.
If she could give up that evil life and marry,
It would be better than having always to dismiss one man
To give welcome to another.

At the first meeting with her lover
She is as perfect as the moon, as graceful as a flower

A jewel amid the dust and wind
With a slim waist that a hand can encircle
And a clever mind that needs no telling.
He is full of regret that they did not meet before
Now, as they lie on the bed drinking, they repine
They pour their wine, sing softly to each other, and embrace.
One looks long and is charmed
The other gazes and is filled with delight.
They know that their joy may last for but a moment
And strive to throw foreboding to the winds.

The songs reminded Hsi-mên Ch'ing of his first meeting with Moonbeam. He was pleased. Porphyry filled his cup again and said, smiling: "My Lord, do not hurry over your wine: Miss Shên has several songs to sing yet. She has only made a beginning. You may decide to send for her to sing for your ladies. In my opinion she is certainly cleverer than Miss Yü."

"Miss Shên," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "if I send someone for you at the Double Ninth festival, will you come?"

"Whenever you think fit to command me, I will come," Miss Shên said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was pleased with the intelligent way she spoke. They drank again. Porphyry thought that the girl's presence might prove hampering to her dealings with Hsi-mên Ch'ing, so, after a few more songs, she told her husband to send Tai An with Miss Shên back to Mistress Lo's house. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave her three ch'ien of silver to buy strings for her instruments. When Miss Shên had thanked him, he told her that he would send someone for her on the eighth day. "My lord," Porphyry said, "you need only tell Wang Ching. I will do the rest." Miss Shên went away. Han Tao-kuo went to the shop and left his wife alone with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Porphyry threw dice and drank with him. Their hearts began to grow warm. Hsi-mên Ch'ing pretended that he was going to change his clothes and went to her room. She followed him; they fastened the door and set to their pleasure. Wang Ching took a lamp and went to another room where he joined Tai An and Ch'in T'ung and drank wine with them.

The boy Hu Hsiu stole a few cups of wine in the kitchen. Then he dismissed the cook and went to the room where

Porphyry had her domestic shrine. There he set down a mattress and went to sleep. But the room was next to Porphyry's, and soon the boy woke up. He could hear sounds coming from the next room. Through a crack in the partition he could see a light. He thought that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had gone and that Han Tao-kuo was sleeping there. He took a pin and made a hole in the paper. Through the hole he peeped. The candles were shining brightly. He was surprised to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing sporting vigorously with his master's wife, whose legs were plainly to be seen over the frame of the bed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was wearing a short silken vest and nothing at all upon the lower part of his body. At the edge of the bed, he was coming and going, plunging and prancing, making a considerable noise. The woman was saying all kinds of endearments to him. Hu Hsiu heard: "My darling, if you would like to burn your naughty sweetheart, do so. Burn me whenever and wherever you like. I shall not forbid you. My body is all yours, and whatever you like to do with it, you may do."

"But your husband may not like it," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Even if that turtle had eight heads and eight galls, he would not dare not to like it; it is only by your bounty that he exists."

"If you will love me only," Hsi-mên said, "I will send him and Lai Pao to stay in the south. I can keep them busy there buying merchandise for me."

"Then send him," the woman said. "Why should you keep him here? Send him away by all means, and when he comes back I will find another woman for him. I belong heart and soul to you, so I want him no longer. Do with me whatever you think fit, I shall be quite content. And if I lie to you, may this unworthy body rot utterly away."

"You need take no oaths," Hsi-mên said.

Hu Hsiu heard all that they said and saw all that they did.

Han Tao-kuo, before he left the house, had seen no sign of the boy and supposed that he had gone to the shop. But when he got to the shop and made inquiries of Wang Hsien and Jung Hai, they told him that the boy was not there. Han Tao-kuo went home again and looked for Hu Hsiu at the front and the back, but could see him nowhere. In the

front court, Wang Ching, Tai An and Ch'in T'ung were drinking.

When Hu Hsiu heard Han Tao-kuo coming he hurriedly lay down again on his mattress and pretended to be asleep. His master came into the room with a light. There the boy was, snoring. Han Tao-kuo kicked him. "Get up at once, you rascal," he said. "I thought you were at the shop. You have no business here. You can find a place to sleep there. Get up and come with me." Hu Hsiu got up, rubbed his eyes, and went to the shop with Han Tao-kuo.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Porphyry enjoyed the pleasures of love for a long time. He burned the woman in three places, at the pit of the stomach, on the mount of Venus, and on the tail bone. Then she got up, dressed herself, and called her maid to bring water that she might wash her hands. Fresh wine was heated; food was brought, and they talked together. After drinking a few cups of wine, Hsi-mên Ch'ing mounted his horse and went away with the three boys, Tai An, Wang Ching and Ch'in T'ung. It was the second night-watch when they reached home.

He went to see the Lady of the Vase. She was lying on her bed. She noticed that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been drinking and asked where he had been.

"Han Tao-kuo invited me to go to his place. He wished to express his sympathy in the loss of our child. There was a young woman named Shên there. She sings very well, certainly more sweetly than Miss Yü, and I am going to send for her at the festival. She shall sing for you. I know how melancholy you have been, but now you must not think about the baby any longer."

He was going to tell Welcome Spring to take his clothes and make ready to go to bed with the Lady of the Vase. "No," she said, "I am still unwell and the maid is making some medicine for me at this moment. Won't you go and sleep with someone else? You must have seen how ill I have been looking lately. There is hardly any breath left in my body. You will take no more pleasure with me."

"My dearest one," Hsi-mên said, "I love you too dearly ever to forsake you. I want to stay with you."

The Lady of the Vase looked at him and smiled. "Who

can believe that deceitful tongue of yours?" she said. "If I were to die to-morrow, would you not forget me? Wait till I am better and, if you still wish to sleep with me, you shall."

"Very well," Hsi-mên said, "if you won't have me, I'll go to Golden Lotus."

"Yes, do," the Lady of the Vase said. "That is exactly where you should go. She is waiting for you in a fever of anxiety. If you do not go she will think I have prevented you."

"In that case, I will go now."

The Lady of the Vase smiled bitterly. "I was teasing you," she said. "But please go."

When he had gone, she got up and sat on the bed. Welcome Spring brought her medicine. She could not restrain her tears, and her fragrant cheeks were wet with them. She sighed as she took the medicine.

Golden Lotus had gone to bed when Hsi-mên Ch'ing came to her room. "You have gone to bed very early," he said.

"What kind of wind has blown you here?" she said. "Where have you been drinking to-day?"

"Han Tao-kuo asked me to go to his place," Hsi-mên said. "He wished to distract me after my bereavement, and to make some return for the kindness I've shown him."

"Looking after his wife when he was away on business, I suppose!" Golden Lotus said.

"Oh, no," Hsi-mên said, "between master and man, anything of that sort would be improper."

"Improper, do you say? Did you put a strap about your loins to make sure that you would not overstep the mark? It is no use trying to hoodwink me. I have known all about it for some time. On your birthday, that strumpet was here flaunting a pin with the character *shou* that you had secretly sneaked from the Lady of the Vase and given to her. The Great Lady and Tower of Jade both noticed it. I told her what I thought and she flushed crimson. But I don't suppose she mentioned that to you. So that is where you have been to-day. Oh, you shameless fellow! A flat-footed, lanky, ugly-looking strumpet like that with the hair all over her forehead and lips as red as blood! What a woman! A great purple-

faced wanton hussy. I can't imagine what you find in her. And you keep her brother here so that he can run messages between the pair of you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing kept on denying. "You funny little slave," he said, laughing, "why do you talk such nonsense? There is nothing at all between us. Besides, her husband was there to-day and I did not even see her."

"You are lying again," Golden Lotus said. "Everybody knows her husband is a barefaced pander. He is the sort of man who guards his sheep and goes picking tinder at the same time. He lets you have his wife and takes your money. You silly fellow, you can only hear guns forty *li* away."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing undressed and sat down on the bed. Golden Lotus stretched out her arm and pulled down his trousers. She touched his staff. It was soft. The clasp was still about it.

"Oh, you dried duck, boiled in a cauldron!" she cried. "Your body may be exhausted, but your mouth is never so. Look at this gentleman! Not a word to say for himself! Now, you villain. How dare you play tricks with that strumpet all this time? See the state you've brought him to! And your mouth is as assured as ever. Will you take an oath? I will tell Plum Blossom to bring a cup of cold water. If you dare drink it, I will believe you. Salt is salt, and vinegar is vinegar all the world over. But I need not tell you that. You are like a bald-headed man putting on a wig. If I let you do as you would like to do, there won't be a woman in the world safe from you. You shameless scoundrel! It is a good thing you are a man. If you were a woman you would be carrying on with every man in the street."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. He could not think of anything to say. He got ready for bed and told Plum Blossom to heat some wine. Then he took a pill from the little gold box, swallowed it and lay down on the bed.

"My dear," he said, "taste it. If you bring it to life again, good for you."

Golden Lotus swore she would do nothing of the sort. "You filthy creature! And it has just been busy in that dirty strumpet's mill. If I did a thing as foul as that, it would kill me."

"You funny little whore," Hsi-mên said, "don't talk nonsense. I tell you I have had nothing to do with her."

"If you have not, why won't you take an oath?"

The argument continued for some time. Finally she invited Hsi-mên Ch'ing to wash. He would not. She took a handkerchief from under the pillow et mentulam tersit, quam inter labra rubra ita recepit ut mox rursus fureret. Ascendit super eam Hsi-mên ferociter progressus et dum crura brachiis premit mentulam miro sonitu promovet. Fulgebat lucerna et visu ille gaudebat. Mulier in lecto iacens obviam surrexit et viri cupidinem magis incendit. In mentulam aliquid pulvisculi rubri imposuit atque iterum inseruit; et cruribus firme captis tercenties oppugnavit. Golden Lotus's eyes closed and she began to tremble. "Darling," she whispered, "you must do no more. You should not have put the powder on him."

"Now, little strumpet," Hsi-mên Ch'ing cried; "are you afraid of me or not? Will you ever treat me disrespectfully again?"

"Darling, forgive me," Golden Lotus said. "I will never dare to talk like that again. Don't thrust so roughly, you will make my hair untidy."

They played happily far into the night, till at last they were tired and went to sleep.

On the day of the Double Ninth festival, the ninth day of the ninth month, Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to the Moon Lady: "A day or two ago, when I was drinking wine with Han Tao-kuo, I saw a certain Miss Shên. She is good-looking and she sings well. I will send a boy for her and she shall stay a few days to sing for you." He told the cooks to prepare a feast and tables were set in the garden in the Hall of the Lovely Prospect. There Hsi-mên and his household kept the festival.

Wang Ching brought Miss Shên. She kotowed to all the ladies. The Moon Lady thought her very pretty and asked how many songs she knew. Miss Shên said she knew a great many. The Moon Lady offered her some refreshments and asked her to sing for a while in the inner court before she went to the garden.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not go to the office that day. He superintended the planting of the chrysanthemums and invited the ladies to go to the garden. Plum Blossom, Flute of Jade,

Welcome Spring and Fragrance were there to serve the wine. Miss Shên sang, and accompanied herself on the lute.

The Lady of the Vase, who was still anything but well, did not come until she had been sent for several times. She was indeed not fit to come; her body was so weak that the wind might have blown her over. Everybody asked her to drink, but she could take only a little. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and the Moon Lady, seeing her so melancholy, did their best to encourage her. "Sister," they said, "you must cheer up. We have brought Miss Shên to sing for you."

"Tell her any song you like," Tower of Jade said. But the Lady of the Vase did not answer them.

While they were drinking, Wang Ching came and said that Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh had come. "Tell them to wait for me in the small harbour," Hsi-mên said, "I will be there in a minute."

"Uncle Ch'ang has brought two boxes," Wang Ching said.

"He has brought me some presents because I have helped him to get a house," Hsi-mên said to the Moon Lady.

"We must see about something for them to eat," the Moon Lady said. "We can't allow them to go away with empty stomachs. You go to them, and I will arrange for them to have some food."

Before Hsi-mên left the ladies, he said to Miss Shên: "Sing the best of all your songs for the Sixth Lady." Then he went to see Po-chüeh.

"Sister," Golden Lotus said to the Lady of the Vase, "tell Miss Shên what song you would like. Father sent for her specially on your account, and you must choose something."

The Lady of the Vase asked for the song: 'Red Dust in the Purple Street.'

"Yes, I know it," Miss Shên said. She took up her lute and sang it with particular care. When the song was done, the Moon Lady said: "Sister, drink a cup of this wine. It is beautifully sweet." The Lady of the Vase could hardly refuse. She took a cup and drank a mouthful, no more. Soon she felt too ill to stay and went back to her room.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Hall of the Kingfisher. Ying Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh were standing beside a pine

thicket admiring the chrysanthemums. Twenty pots of the most renowned blooms stood there, all more than seven feet high. Among them were such famous flowers as Scarlet Cloak, Doctor's Red, Purple Cloak, Golden Girdle, White *Fên Shih* and Yellow *Fên Shih*, and many others. Po-chüeh and Ch'ang Chih-chieh came forward and made a reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, then Ch'ang called the man who had come with him to bring the boxes.

"What is this?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Po-chüeh answered. "Brother Chang," he said, "is eager to express his sense of your kindness in helping him to get a house. He had nothing to give you, but his wife has prepared this box of crabs and a couple of roast ducks and he asked me to come with him so that we can enjoy them together."

"Brother Ch'ang," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "there was no need for you to trouble. Your wife is only just better. She should not have bothered to cook these things."

"I told him so," Ying Po-chüeh said, "but he thought it would be better than anything else he could get."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told a boy to open the box. There were forty large crabs, ready dressed with peppers, ginger, garlic and herbs, and prepared with oil, sauce and vinegar. They smelt very tasty and promised excellent eating. The two roast ducks were done in the most attractive style. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'un Hung and Wang Ching to take them to the kitchen. He gave a small present to the porter and thanked Ch'ang Chih-chieh. Ch'in T'ung raised the lattice and they went into the Hall of the Kingfisher. Po-chüeh could not find words to express his admiration of the chrysanthemums. He asked where they had come from. "Eunuch Liu, the warden of the brick-kilns, sent me these twenty pots," Hsi-mên told him. "Not only the plants but the pots as well."

"Indeed!" said Po-chüeh. "They are the genuine official pottery too. The clay is of the highest quality: it is put through the finest of sieves and pressed by the workmen's feet. That is how such flower-pots as these are made. They are made like Su-chou bricks, and they are by no means easy to get hold of in these days."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing called for tea. "Brother Ch'ang," he said, "when did you move into your new house?"

Po-chüeh answered: "He moved in three days after the money was paid. Yesterday was a lucky day. He bought a number of things, and opened a small shop. Mistress Ch'ang's younger brother keeps the books."

"We must buy presents and celebrate the occasion," Hsi-mên said. "We don't want a crowd of people, Hsieh Hsi-ta perhaps, and you and I will arrange for food to be taken to Brother Ch'ang's house, so that he may not be put to any expense. We will engage two singing-girls and have a merry house-warming."

"I should have invited you myself," Ch'ang said, "but I did not dare. The house is so small I thought you would not like it."

"Not at all!" Hsi-mên said, "we don't wish you to spend your money. I will send word to Hsieh Hsi-ta myself." He said to Ch'in T'ung: "Go and ask your Uncle Hsieh to come and see me."

"Which singing-girls are you going to send for?" Ying Po-chüeh asked.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Oh, Moonbeam and Splendour, I think."

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "you didn't wish to tell me which two girls you would have, but I guessed. Now what do you think of Moonbeam? Is she more tasty than Cassia?"

"There is none better," Hsi-mên said.

"Why wouldn't she talk to us on your birthday?" Po-chüeh asked. "It seems to me she is a very cunning girl."

"Next time I go to see her," Hsi-mên said, "I will take you with me. She and her sister play backgammon very well and we will have a game with them."

"By all means," Po-chüeh said. "I will certainly go and have a game with the young lady. I don't intend to let her off altogether."

"You naughty dog," said Hsi-mên, "don't play your tricks on her."

Hsieh Hsi-ta came, made a reverence, and sat down. "Brother Ch'ang has just bought a new house," Hsi-mên said to him. "He has moved into it without a word to us. I suggest that we all contribute a small sum and I will have a feast prepared here and send it round to his house. We will

engage two singing-girls and have a gay time there. But he must not be put to any expense."

"Brother," Hsieh Hsi-ta said, "you have only to say the word and the money shall be sent to you at once. Will anyone else be at the party?"

"Nobody else," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Each of us will give two pieces of silver."

"His place is not very big," Po-chüeh said. "It will not hold many people."

Then Ch'in T'ung came and said that Uncle Wu had come. Hsi-mên told the boy to bring him in. Uncle Wu made reverence to the three guests, then to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and sat down. A boy brought fresh tea and they drank it together. Then Uncle Wu rose and said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Brother, will you come with me to the inner court for a moment? I should like to speak to you." Hsi-mên Ch'ing got up and they went to the inner court together. They went to the Moon Lady's room, but she was in the arbour with the other ladies drinking wine and listening to Miss Shên singing. When she was told that her brother had come, she went back to her room and told Tiny Jade to bring tea.

Uncle Wu took ten taels of silver from his sleeve and gave them to the Moon Lady. "I have only had three pieces of silver from the office," he said, "so I can only pay my brother these ten taels. I shall have to pay the remainder by degrees."

"There is no hurry about it, Brother-in-law," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I am afraid I am very late already," Uncle Wu said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him if the work upon the granary was finished. "There is still another month's work to be done," Uncle Wu told him.

"Well," said Hsi-mên, "when it is complete, you will reap your reward."

"Brother-in-law," Uncle Wu said, "this year, I understand, a number of military officials are to be appointed. I hope you will do anything you can for me by way of recommendation."

"Certainly," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "anything I can do for you, I will."

"You will go to the outer court, Brother?" the Moon Lady said.

"Perhaps I had better not go," Uncle Wu said, "the other three gentlemen may have business to transact."

"No," Hsi-mên said, "a short time ago, Brother Ch'ang borrowed a few taels from me and took a new house. He has just moved into it, and to-day he brought me a present of food and I asked them to stay and enjoy it. You will be very welcome." He took Uncle Wu to the outer court. The Moon-Lady went and bade the cooks get food ready for them. Ch'in T'ung and Wang Ching prepared the table. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave orders that the cellar should be opened and a jar of chrysanthemum wine brought. It had been given to him by Magistrate Hsia. The wine was brought and opened. It was pale green in colour and very sweet. Before it was poured into the wine-pot, a jar of cold water was mixed with it to make it milder. It had a very delicate flavour, finer than that of grape wine.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Wang Ching to give a small cup to Uncle Wu, then to Ying Po-chüeh and the others. They sipped it and spoke of it appreciatively. Then food was brought, and after they had had some, the crabs and roast ducks were served. Ying Po-chüeh urged Uncle Wu to eat freely. Hsieh Hsi-ta was astounded: he could not imagine how they could be made so tasty and tender.

"They are a present from Brother Ch'ang," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I have lived to be fifty-two years old," Uncle Wu said, "and never in all my life have I known crabs cooked in this way to be so good."

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh said, "have you given the ladies a taste?"

"I have," said Hsi-mên.

"Mistress Ch'ang's cooking is really marvellous," said Po-chüeh.

Ch'ang Chih-chieh smiled. "Oh," said he, "my poor wife does not really cook very well. I brought these things thinking perhaps they might afford a little pleasure."

They enjoyed their crabs with the wine while, at Hsi-mên Ch'ing's bidding, Ch'un Hung and Shu T'ung sang southern melodies. Po-chüeh thought he heard music. "Is Cassia here?" he said. "Who else can be playing like that?"

"Listen again," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"If it is not Cassia, it must be Silver Maid."

"You are guessing, Beggar Ying," Hsi-mên said. "This girl is blind."

"It must be Miss Yü, then?" Po-chüeh said.

"No, it is a Miss Shên. She is young and pretty and an excellent singer."

"Then why not tell her to sing a song for us?"

"I brought her here to sing for the ladies," Hsi-mên said. "Your ears are very sharp if you can hear all this way off."

"Yes, my eyes are so clear that they can see a thousand *li* and my ears can hear a bee buzzing forty *li* away."

"Beggar," Hsieh Hsi-ta said, "your ears are as sharp as a rabbit's. Of course you can hear."

Then Po-chüeh said: "Brother, you really must send for her. I should like to see her. Tell her to sing just one song for Uncle Wu. You can't refuse, for his sake."

At last, Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Wang Ching to go and ask Miss Shên to come and sing for Uncle Wu. She came, kotoed, and sat down. Po-chüeh asked her age and she told him she was twenty-one. Then he asked how many songs she knew and she said she knew a number for lute accompaniment, and more than a hundred short songs. "That is not bad," Po-chüeh said.

"Miss Shên," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "we do not wish to put you to any trouble, but will you be good enough to take your lute and sing for us 'The Four Dreams and the Eight Spaces'?" He told Wang Ching to fill up his guests' glasses. Miss Shên played and sang sweetly.

When the Lady of the Vase reached her apartment she went to wash her hands. Suddenly, the blood gushed from her, and her eyes were dazzled. She got up, as quickly as she could, and pulled up her skirts, then fainted and struck the ground with her head. Welcome Spring was there and did what she could, but the Lady of the Vase hurt herself. Welcome Spring and Heart's Delight got her to bed. She lay there unconscious. Welcome Spring was frightened and told her fellow-maid to go for the Moon Lady. All the ladies hurried to see what was amiss. Welcome Spring and the nurse were on the bed, holding up the Lady of the Vase.

"She was quite well a moment ago," the Moon Lady said. "What has happened to make her like this?" Welcome Spring showed her the chamber-pot.

The Moon Lady was startled. "Perhaps," she said, "the blood has flowed more freely because of the wine she drank."

"But she only drank a little," Tower of Jade and Golden Lotus said together. They made ginger broth and poured it down her throat, but it was a long time before she came round and was able to speak to them.

"Sister," the Moon Lady said, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing very much," the Lady of the Vase said. "I got up and pulled up my skirt; then my eyes seemed to go black; everything whirled round and round, and I couldn't keep myself from falling."

The Moon Lady was going to tell Tai An to go for his master and also for Dr Jên, but the Lady of the Vase said: "No, don't say anything about it. I should not like to disturb their party."

The Moon Lady told Welcome Spring to straighten the coverlets and help the Lady of the Vase to go to bed. She and the other ladies gave up their amusements and went to their own rooms.

Uncle Wu and the others stayed until the evening, then Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Moon Lady's room. She told him how the Lady of the Vase had fainted. Hsi-mên went at once to see her. She was lying, pale as wax, upon the bed. She held him by the sleeve and cried. He asked her what the trouble was. "As soon as I came in," she said, "the blood poured from me like water. Then I fainted."

Hsi-mên saw that her head was slightly bruised. "What were the maids about to let you fall and hurt your face?" he said.

"It was a very good thing for me the maid and the nurse could come to my help," the Lady of the Vase said. "If they hadn't, I should have been very much worse hurt."

"I will send for Doctor Jên the first thing in the morning," Hsi-mên said. He spent the night in her room, sleeping on another bed.

The following morning, after he had been to the office, Hsi-mên sent Ch'in T'ung for the doctor. It was a little after noon when Dr Jên arrived. Hsi-mên Ch'ing received him in

the great hall and they had tea. Then he sent a boy to tell the ladies. They had the room cleaned and incense burned, and Dr Jên was asked to go and see the Lady of the Vase. When he had examined her he came back to the great hall.

"The lady is much worse than she was before," he told Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "The trouble has gone to her liver and the lungs are much inflamed. The wood element gets stronger and stronger and the earth element weaker. Her blood is overheated and circulates too violently. It comes down like a mountain-torrent and nothing can hold it back. If the blood that comes from her were dark in colour she might still be saved, but it seems lighter; it is, in fact, fresh blood. I will send her some medicine and, if it does her any good, there may be some hope. If it does not, I fear there is nothing I can do for her."

"Master," Hsi-mên said, "I beg you to make some medicine for her with all the skill at your disposal. You shall be handsomely rewarded."

"Do not speak of reward," Dr Jên said. "You and I are good friends. I will certainly do my best for her." They took more tea, and the doctor left. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'in T'ung to take a roll of Hang-chou silk and two taels of white gold to the doctor and bring the medicine back with him. The medicine he brought was called a tonic for the spleen. The Lady of the Vase took it very hot, but the blood poured from her more than ever. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing, very much distressed, sent for Dr Hu, who lived in the same street. Dr Hu said that anger had disorganised the pulse, and that the blood had become feverish. He, also, sent some medicine. The Lady of the Vase took it, but it was like a pebble thrown into the depths of the ocean.

Now that doctors were visiting the house all the time, the Moon Lady decided not to keep Miss Shên for more than one night. She gave her five ch'ien of silver, some clothes and some ornaments. Miss Shên went away in a sedan-chair, and a box of food was sent with her.

When Hua Tzŭ-yu was at the party given to celebrate the opening of the shop, he heard that the Lady of the Vase was ill. He told his wife, and his wife brought a box of presents

and came to see the invalid. When she saw how thin and pale the Lady of the Vase had become, both women cried. The Moon Lady ordered tea and took Mistress Hua to the inner court.

Han Tao-kuo suggested to Hsi-mên Ch'ing that Dr Chao, a graduate of the Imperial College of Medicine and a specialist in the diseases of women, might be called in. "He is an expert on the pulse," he said. "My wife once had trouble of much the same sort and Doctor Chao cured her. I commend him to you for your lady."

As soon as he heard this, Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'in T'ung and Wang Ching to go at once on horseback outside the Western Gate and ask Dr Chao to come. Then he sent for Ying Po-chüeh and discussed the matter with him. "My sixth wife," he said, "is very ill. What can I do about it?"

"I heard she was better," Po-chüeh said in surprise. "Is she worse again?"

"She has been very sad ever since the baby died," Hsi-mên said, "and now her old trouble has returned. Yesterday, on the festival day, I got Miss Shên here especially for her. But she didn't take any interest. She went back to her own room and there fainted, fell on the floor, and bruised her face. I sent for Doctor Jên. He said she was worse than she had ever been. She took his medicine, but the blood only poured from her the more."

"I hear you sent for Doctor Hu, too," Po-chüeh said. "What did he say?"

"He said that anger had disorganised her pulse. She took his medicine, but it did her no good. To-day, my clerk Han recommended Doctor Chao. His name is Chao Lung-kang and he is a specialist in women's diseases. I have sent two boys to fetch him. I am very very anxious about her. It is all on account of the baby. She thinks about him day and night. Women never know where to stop. I have tried to console her but she won't listen to me and I don't know what to do."

P'ing An came and announced Master Ch'iao. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the hall and there they sat for a while with Ying Po-chüeh.

"I hear that your Sixth Lady is not well," Master Ch'iao said. "I have come to inquire about her."

"It is the child's death," Hsi-mên said. "It has made her so melancholy that an old trouble has returned. It was very kind of you to come."

"Have you sent for any particular doctor?" Master Ch'iao asked.

"First she took Doctor Jên's medicine," Hsi-mên said. "Then, yesterday, I sent for Doctor Hu. There was no improvement and now I have sent for Doctor Chao."

Then Ch'iao said: "Near the office there lives an old gentleman named Ho who has a great knowledge of medicine. His son, Ho Ch'i-hsüan, has become a very famous doctor. Why don't you ask him to come?"

"I will send for him when Doctor Chao has gone."

"I would suggest having them together," Ch'iao said. "Then they can hold a consultation about the cause of the illness. They can prescribe afterwards and their prescription ought to be effective."

"You are right," said Hsi-mên. He told Tai An to take his card and go with Ch'iao T'ung to ask old master Ho to come.

When Master Ho came, he bowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'iao, and they made him take the seat of honour. "It is several years since I last saw you," Hsi-mên said politely, "and now your hair is quite white."

"How is your son doing?" Ch'iao asked the old man.

"He goes to the office every day," Ho said, "and that does not leave him much time for anything else. I myself have to go and see those patients who are not of official rank."

"You are very old," Ying Po-chüeh said, "yet you seem very strong."

"Yes," said the old man, "I am eighty-one years old."

They had tea and a boy was sent to give warning to the ladies. Then the old gentleman went to see the Lady of the Vase. He came back to the hall.

"I will tell you what is the matter with the lady," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Master Ch'iao. "The seed got into her blood. Then she had a fit of anger. This intermixture of anger and blood has caused the trouble. Whether I am correct or not I do not know."

"Yes, you are right," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but what I want to know is, can you cure her?"

Just then, Ch'in T'ung and Wang Ching came back with Dr Chao. Old Master Ho asked who he was. "This is a doctor who was recommended to me by one of my clerks," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Don't mention the fact that you have examined her. When he has seen her you can consult with him."

Dr Chao came in and made a reverence to them all. The two old men, Ho and Ch'iao, sat in the places of honour, and made room on their left for Dr Chao. Ying Po-chüeh sat on the right and Hsi-mên Ch'ing in the host's place. Dr Chao asked the names.

"This is Ho, and I am Ch'iao," said Ch'iao.

"My name is Ying," said Ying Po-chüeh. "I presume you are Doctor Chao."

"I am," said Chao, "and my second name is Lung-kang. My grandfather was an official in the Imperial College of Medicine; my father was a doctor of high standing, so that I have the experience of three generations behind me. Every day I work very hard upon the theories of Wang Shu-ho, Tung Yüan, and Wu T'ing-tzü. I read the poem upon the Nature of Medicine, the Su Wên of Huang-ti, the Nan Ching, and, of living masters, the Secret Art of Tan Hsi, the cure of heart troubles also by Tan Hsi, Chieh Ku's Secret of Pulse Examination, the Thirteen Prescriptions, and so forth. I have read nearly everything that is written about medicine, so that, when I have to prescribe, I have a very harmonious system at my disposal. My fingers are able to discern the most profound workings of the pulse. I can diagnose the conflict between Yin and Yang according to the seasons. I determine the sinking or the floating of the pulse according to internal and external relations. And, in cases of fever or chill, I leave no detail unconsidered. There is nothing about the pulse I do not know, but, really, I cannot attempt to explain how much I do know."

Old Master Ho listened attentively. "May I ask what is the first thing to be done in the consideration of a patient's case?" he said.

"According to the ancient masters," Dr Chao said, "when one deals with any patient, one should look at him, listen to him, question him, and examine him. Then a miraculous cure is certain. I always begin by asking my patient questions. then

I feel his pulse and consider his general appearance. Unless we see a patient as Tzu P'ing, the reader of fortunes, sees him, it is impossible to be quite definite about the ailment."

"Please, doctor, come and see my wife," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He told Ch'in T'ung to warn the ladies in the inner court, and took Dr Chao to see the Lady of the Vase. She had just gone to sleep and had to be waked up again. Then she sat up in bed propped up with pillows and bedclothes. Dr Chao examined first her left hand, then her right.

"Lady," he said, "please raise your head." The Lady of the Vase did what she was told. Then the doctor said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Kindly ask the lady who I am."

"Who is this gentleman?" Hsi-mên said to his wife.

The Lady of the Vase looked at Chao. "A doctor, I suppose," she said.

"There!" said Dr Chao, "you have no need to worry, Sir. She can still distinguish between one person and another."

"Be very careful," Hsi-mên said, "and your fee shall be correspondingly large."

Dr Chao studied the Lady of the Vase for a long time. "Judging by her general appearance and her pulse, I think she must be suffering from a fever or some wasting disease. She must have been ill either before she had a baby, or afterwards."

"You are quite wrong," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Kindly examine her again."

Dr Chao gazed at the Lady of the Vase and murmured: "Why is her face so pale? Her stomach must be out of order—or is it her blood?"

"Let me tell you, Doctor," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "My wife suffers from an issue of blood. It is that which makes her so thin and weak. If you have any medicine that will do her any good, I will pay you well for it."

"I said it was the blood," Dr Chao said. "Have no fear. I have some excellent medicine."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him back to the hall. Old Master Ho and Master Ch'iao asked what the doctor thought.

"In my opinion she is discharging too much blood," Dr Chao said.

"And what medicine are you going to give her?" said the old gentleman.

"I have a perfectly wonderful medicine which will certainly cure the lady. It is made of these drugs—liquorice, spurge, *kang sha*, hellebore, croton, coriander flowers, a mixture of ginger juice with raw pinella, aconite and almond *t'ien ma*. Make all these into a pill with honey and take it with spirit in the morning."

"But, it seems to me, those drugs are much too strong," the old gentleman said. "I can't believe that would do at all."

"Why not?" said Dr Chao. "Doctors have always agreed that strong medicine, bitter to the taste, is excellent for invalids."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing realised that the doctor was talking nothing but rubbish; he gave him two ch'ien of silver and dismissed him. He did not go with him to the gate, but he made no complaint because Han Tao-kuo had recommended him.

"The man is a fool," he said to Master Ch'iao.

"I did not venture to say so before," old Doctor Ho said, "but the fellow is very well known outside the gate. People call him 'Chao the Trickster'. He is always defrauding people and strolling about the streets. What should he know of medicine? As for your lady's illness, I will make up some medicine for her when I get home. If, when she has taken it, the flow of blood stops and she feels more comfortable, I will continue the treatment, but, if this medicine does not help, there is nothing else I can do." Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave the old gentleman a tael of silver and he went away.

Tai An was sent for the medicine. The Lady of the Vase took it that evening but there was no improvement in her condition.

"Do not give her any more medicine," the Moon Lady said. "She has had nothing to eat or drink and medicine on an empty stomach is useless. Don't you remember that Wu the Immortal said she would have a blood disorder when she was twenty-seven years old? She is twenty-seven now. You would do well to send for Wu again. He can tell us whether she will live or not. If some evil star is overshadowing her life, we will ask the Immortal to offer sacrifice for her."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing at once sent a boy with his card to make inquiry at Major Chou's house. Major Chou's people said that Wu was a man who never stayed long in the same place. "When he is here," they said, "he always lives at the Temple of the Guardian Spirits of the Soil, south of the city, but, in the

fourth month of this year, he went to the Wu Tang mountains. If it is a fortune you wish to have told, there is a certain Master Huang who lives at the Taoist temple. He is well skilled in the art. He will not accept more than three ch'iens of silver, but he will not leave his temple."

This was reported to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He immediately told Ch'ên Ching-chi to take three ch'iens of silver and go to the Taoist Temple to consult Master Huang.

Outside the temple hung a sign on which was written: 'Here, by the divinely blessed method of the Book of Changes, the decrees of Fate are interpreted. The fee is three ch'iens.' Ching-chi went in and bowed to Master Huang. He gave him the three ch'iens.

"The fortune I would ask you to tell," he said, "is that of a woman twenty-seven years old, born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month."

Master Huang made a calculation upon the abacus and said: "In this fate we have the year *Hsin Wei*, the month *Kêng Yin*, the day *Hsin Mao*, and the hour *Chia Wu*. The life would appear to be one in well-to-do circumstances. The fate seems to run in the years with a four. The fourth year is *Chi Wei*, the fourteenth *Wu Wu*, the twenty-fourth *Ting Ssü*, and the thirty-fourth *Ping Ch'ên*. This year is *Ting Yu*, and the evil stars are all in the ascendant. The *Chi Tu* star commands her life, and the five evil spirits are always busy making trouble for her. The *Chi Tu* star is the star of darkness, its form is that of a bundle of tangled silk which has neither beginning nor end. There is a great deal of unhappiness and some illness. The first month, the second, third, seventh and ninth are all months in which illness appears. This year, too, is unpropitious as regards children. There are other sources of anxiety, quarrels, losses of property, and, because she is a woman, the situation is more disastrous."

Master Huang wrote down what he had said and Ch'ên Ching-chi went back with it. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was with Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên. When Ching-chi gave him the paper, he took it to the inner court and read it to the Moon Lady. It was obvious that what destiny had in store for Lady of the Vase was more to be feared than hoped for, and they were full of sorrow.

THE DEATH OF THE SIXTH LADY

WHEN Hsi-mên Ch'ing realised that no medicine seemed to cure the Lady of the Vase, and when all the fortune-tellers assured him that her case was hopeless, he did not know what to do. At first, the Lady of the Vase still tried to get up, dress, comb her hair, and leave her bed when she had to attend to the intimate details of her toilet, but, by degrees, she came to eat less and less and grew thinner and thinner. In a very short time she, who had been such a flower-like creature, was faded and withered. She could no longer get out of bed. Papers were put on her mattress, and she told her maids to burn incense all the time so that there might not be an unpleasant odour. Hsi-mên Ch'ing saw that her arms were as thin as threads. He was nearly always in her room, weeping, and only went to his office every other day.

"Dear man," the Lady of the Vase said to him, "you must not neglect your duties. I am afraid you will get behindhand with your official business. Don't worry about me. I have this trouble, but if the blood will only stop, and I can manage to eat and drink a little, I shall be better. You are a man. It is not fitting that you should stay at home with me all the time."

"Sister," Hsi-mên said, and he wept as he spoke, "how can I leave you when I see you like this?"

"Oh, you foolish man, if the Fates have decreed that I must die, who can prevent it? I only wish to say one thing to you. I don't know why, but, when I am alone, something terrible seems to overshadow me. Shadowy forms are always before my eyes and, at night, I am haunted by evil dreams. Men with swords and staves quarrel and struggle with me. They snatch my baby from my breast and make to throw me on the ground. Then my former husband comes and says that he has a new house and wants me to go with him. But I did not mean to tell you this."

"When a man dies," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "he is as a light blown out. No one can say whither he has gone. It is because

you have been ill so long. You are weak. I don't believe any evil spirit really comes to trouble you. But I will get Abbot Wu to give me some charms and I will put them up at your door. Then we shall see if there are devils in this house."

He went to the outer court and told Tai An to go to the Temple of the Jade King to get the charms.

On his way, Tai An met Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta. He hastily dismounted. "Where are you going?" Ying Po-chüeh said to him. "Is your master at home?"

"Yes," said Tai An, "and I am going to the Temple of the Jade King for some charms."

The two friends went on to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"When Brother Hsieh heard how ill your lady is, he was terribly shocked," Po-chüeh said. "We have come to ask how she is."

"These last few days," Hsi-mên told them, "she has grown so thin that she looks like another woman. Really, I don't know what to do."

"Why did you send Tai An to the temple?" Po-chüeh said.

Hsi-mên told them about the evil dreams which the Lady of the Vase had. "I fear there may be devils about the house," he said, "so I have asked for some charms to drive them away."

"Oh," Hsieh Hsi-ta said, "I am sure it is only because she is so weak. There are no devils here."

Then Po-chüeh said: "Brother, if you wish to get rid of devils, it is a very simple matter. Priest P'an, of the Temple of the Five Sacred Mountains outside the city gate, has power over the Five Thunders and he can exorcise devils of every sort. He is known as P'an the Expeller of Demons. With his charms and wonder-working philtres he often gets people out of difficulties of this sort. Send for him, Brother, and then we shall know whether there are devils at work here or not. And indeed, if you ask him, he may be able to cure your lady."

"As soon as the boy comes back from Abbot Wu, I will send him with you to P'an," Hsi-mên said.

"We won't wait for him," Po-chüeh said. "I will go at once. I most sincerely hope that your lady may be cured, and, if there is anything I can do to help, I will do it, even if I have

to go on my head instead of my feet." He went off with Hsieh Hsi-ta.

When Tai An came back with the charms, they were put upon the door of the Lady of the Vase's rooms. But that night she was terrified once more. She said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "He has been with two other men to carry me off. They ran away as you came in."

"Don't believe it," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said; "Brother Ying says it is all due to your weakness. He tells me that he knows a priest called P'an who will give us some very efficacious charms and medicine, and who has the power to drive out devils. I have told Brother Ying to get him to come to-morrow morning, and I'm sure he will get rid of all the disturbing influences."

"Oh, Brother," said the Lady of the Vase, "send for him this very moment. The dead man has gone away in a fury and I am afraid he will come back and take me with him. Send for him now."

"If you are afraid, I will send for Silver Maid to keep you company," Hsi-mên said.

The Lady of the Vase shook her head. "I don't wish to trouble her," she said, "I shouldn't like her to lose business."

"What about old woman Fêng, then?"

The Lady of the Vase nodded, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent Lai An for the old woman. But the door was locked and the old woman was not to be found. Lai An told Cherry Blossom that, when she came back, she must be told to go at once to Hsi-mên Ch'ing's house because the Sixth Lady needed her. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Tai An that, early next morning, he must go with Ying Po-chüeh to the Temple of the Five Sacred Mountains to bring the priest P'an.

The next day, Nun Wang came. She brought a box of specially treated rice, twenty large milk biscuits and a small box of preserved egg-plants. When she arrived, the Lady of the Vase bade Welcome Spring help her to sit up in bed. Nun Wang made a reverence and the Lady of the Vase asked her to sit down.

"Teacher," she said, "I have not seen you since you had those texts printed for me. Though I have been so very ill, you have never come to see me."

"I did not know about your illness, Lady," the nun said. "It was only yesterday that the Great Lady sent a servant to the convent and I heard for the first time that you were ill. And, speaking of the printing of those texts, you don't know what trouble I had with that wicked old nun Hsüeh. You remember it was arranged that we should both make terms with the printer. I got nothing out of it, but she secretly persuaded the printer to give her five taels. She did not even let me see a penny. Lady, when that bad old woman dies, she will go to the very depths of Hell. She put me in such a state that I even forgot the Great Lady's birthday, and I did not come."

"Let her go her evil way," the Lady of the Vase said, "but do not quarrel with her."

"I had no intention of quarrelling with her," the nun said.

"The Great Lady is annoyed with you," the Lady of the Vase said. "She says you have never read the scriptures for her."

"Oh, Buddha!" Nun Wang cried, "I don't profess to be a saint, but I should not dare to forget a thing like that. I have been reading them all the time. I only stopped yesterday when the month was up. I have just seen her and told her about my troubles. I told her that I had only just heard about your illness, and I have nothing to offer but this rice, the preserved fruits, and the biscuits which you will perhaps make into soup. The Great Lady told Tiny Jade to bring me here to see you."

Tiny Jade opened the boxes. The Lady of the Vase looked at them and thanked the nun. Then the nun said: "Sister Welcome Spring, please go and warm two of these biscuits. I want to see your lady take something to eat."

Welcome Spring took away the things and the Lady of the Vase ordered tea to be brought for the nun.

"I have had tea in the Great Lady's room," the nun said. "I only want to see you eat some porridge."

Welcome Spring set the table and brought in four kinds of tea-cakes for Nun Wang. For the Lady of the Vase she brought some porridge with a plate of preserved fruits and two steamed milk biscuits. There were two bowls of porridge and a pair of small ivory chop-sticks. Welcome Spring and Heart's Delight held the bowls and assisted the Lady of the Vase. But

she only took two or three mouthfuls of porridge and nibbled at the cakes. Then she shook her head and would eat no more. She told them to take the things away.

"We must eat and drink," Nun Wang said. "Do have a little more. This porridge is so good."

"I would if I could," the Lady of the Vase said.

Nun Wang helped to pull the bed-clothes over her and, as she did so, noticed how wasted the Lady of the Vase had become. She was shocked. "Lady," she said, "you were fatter than this when I saw you last. What has made you so thin?"

"She was better for a while," Heart's Delight said. "Then something angered her and her illness came back again. Father sent for the doctor and he gave her some medicine which made her very much better. But, in the eighth month, the baby took fright and was very ill. My lady watched him day and night and never slept at all. She hoped he would recover, but, alas, he died. Then she cried and sobbed all day. Then, too, she was made angry, and, all things considered, got into a state which no one could stand, even if she were strong as iron or stone. Anybody but my lady would have complained and so got rid of her trouble, but she never tells anybody, only reluctantly when she is made to do so."

"Who upset her?" the nun asked. "Your master loves her and the Great Lady respects her. There are only the few other ladies and I can't think any one of them would offend her."

"Ah, you don't know," Heart's Delight said. She told the younger maid to go and see if the door was fast and continued: "It was the Fifth Lady. It was her cat which scratched the baby and made him have a fit. Master came and asked my lady, but she would not tell him and, in the end, the Great Lady told him. He killed the cat. The Fifth Lady never relented. She went on making trouble with us. In the middle of the eighth month the baby died. The Fifth Lady was delighted and has insulted us every day since. We can hear clearly everything she says, and my lady cannot help being upset. She weeps nearly all the time. Anger and sorrow together have gradually brought her to this pass. Only Heaven knows what a good heart she has. She never shows an angry face to the other ladies. If she has nice clothes, she will not wear them unless the other ladies have dresses like them."

There is not a single person in the house to whom my lady has not been kind at some time or another. The trouble is that, though they are ready enough to take things from her, they never have a kind word to say about her."

"What do you mean?" Nun Wang said.

"There is old lady P'an, the Fifth Lady's mother. Whenever Father stays the night in the Fifth Lady's room, the old lady comes and sleeps here. And when she goes away, my lady never lets her go without stuff for making clothes or shoes. She gives her money too. Yet the Fifth Lady never has a good word to say about it."

"Oh, woman!" cried the Lady of the Vase, "why do you have so much to say? Let them do what they like. Heaven is mighty, yet Heaven never boasts; and Earth is solid, yet Earth never speaks."

"Buddha!" said Nun Wang, "who would have known that you had such a sweet disposition? But Heaven has eyes; Heaven will see your good works and reward you."

"Teacher," the Lady of the Vase said, "what reward shall I receive? Not even my child is left to me. I suffer so much pain, and have an ailment so unpleasant that even as a spirit I shall be unclean. I am going to give you some money so that, when I am dead, you can employ a few nuns to read as many texts as you can find so that this nasty disease may not cling to me for ever."

"You are looking too far ahead," Nun Wang said. "Your heart is so good that Heaven cannot fail to protect you."

While they were talking, Ch'in T'ung came. "Father says this room must be cleaned," he told Welcome Spring. "Uncle Hua has come to see your lady. He is in the outer court now."

Nun Wang stood up. "I must go to the inner court," she said.

"Teacher," said the Lady of the Vase, "don't go away. I wish you to stay for a few days. There is something I should like to say to you." The nun promised to stay.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing brought in Uncle Hua. The Lady of the Vase lay still upon her bed and did not speak.

"I never knew you were ill until yesterday," Uncle Hua said. "I have come specially to see you."

"It is very good of you," the Lady of the Vase said. She turned her face to the wall.

Hua stayed a short time, then went back to the outer court with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "Our late noble relative," he said to his host, "when he was Governor of Kuang-nan, had some *gynura* medicine. It is a certain cure for all those troubles from which women suffer. If she takes five fêns of it, mixed with a little wine, it will stop that flow of blood. I know she has this medicine. Why has she not tried it?"

"She has tried it," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Yesterday the Prefect Hu came to see me. I told him about her illness, and he, too, told me of some medicine. That was white cockscomb flowers. It is mixed with a little charcoal and taken with wine. She took it, and, for a day, the flow of blood ceased, but the next day it was worse than ever."

"It is a very difficult case," Hua Tzŭ-yu said. "I think, brother-in-law, that you would do well to look out for a coffin for her. I will send my wife to see her to-morrow." He went away.

While the nurse and Welcome Spring were changing the bed for the Lady of the Vase, old woman Fêng came. She made a reverence, and Heart's Delight said to her: "You are a fine one, Mother Fêng! You have never been near your mistress and yesterday Master had to send for you. Lai An said your door was locked. Where were you?"

"I can't tell you what a hard life I have," old woman Fêng said. "Every day I go to the temple for my religious devotions. I set off in the morning and, for some reason or other, I never get back till night. When I get home there is always some priest to come and see me. Father Chang, or Father Li, or Father Wang."

"An old woman like you and so many priests to visit you!" said Heart's Delight. "This is the first time we have heard of Father Wang."

The Lady of the Vase smiled. "The old woman always talks nonsense," she said.

Then Heart's Delight said: "Old woman, you refuse to come when you are sent for. For the last few days my lady has had nothing to eat and she has been terribly depressed. You have only just come, yet you have made her laugh already. If you will only stay a few days, I'm sure she will soon be better."

"Yes," old woman Fêng said, "I am a good doctor when it

is a question of driving care away." She laughed. Then she looked at the Lady of the Vase. "Lady," she said, "I had hoped to find you better. Are you able to get out of bed when you wish to relieve nature?"

"If only she could it would be splendid," Welcome Spring said. "Until a few days ago, she could just manage to get up, we helping her, of course, but latterly she has not been able, and we have had to put papers in the bed."

As they were talking, Hsi-mên Ch'ing came in. "Old woman Fêng," he said, "you ought to be here nearly all the time. Why have you been so long away?"

"My Lord," the old woman said, "you know this is the season for preserving vegetables. I have been preserving some, so that if anyone is brought to me, I shall be able to give her something to eat. I have no other way of buying them."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Yesterday I was having the vegetables on my farm dug up and you might have had a bushel or two."

"I am greatly obliged to your Lordship," the old woman said. Then she went to another room. Hsi-mên Ch'ing sat down beside the bed and Welcome Spring burned incense.

"How do you feel to-day?" Hsi-mên asked the Lady of the Vase. Then he said to Welcome Spring: "Has your mother had any gruel?" Welcome Spring told him that the nun had brought some milk biscuits but that her mistress had only tasted them and taken a tiny bit of porridge.

"Brother Ying and the boy went for priest P'an," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but he was not at his temple. To-morrow I will send Lai Pao."

"Oh, do send for him at once," the Lady of the Vase said. "I see that dead man whenever I close my eyes."

"It is all because your mind is so enfeebled," Hsi-mên said. "Try to pull yourself together and don't let such ideas get hold of you. When the priest comes he will exorcise any evil spirits there may be about. He will give you medicine too, and you will soon be well again."

"Brother," the Lady of the Vase said, "there is no hope for me. I had always hoped to live long years with you, and now I am dying when I am only twenty-seven. What an evil fate is mine that I must leave you! I shall go and never see you

again until you come to the gate of the spirits." She held his hand in hers and cried, sobbing softly, for she was too weak to make a noise. Hsi-mên cried with her.

"Sister," he said, "if there is anything that you would say to me, say it."

In the midst of their grief, Ch'in T'ung came and said: "An officer has come from your court. He says that to-morrow is the fifteenth and there is a great deal of important business to be done. They wish to know whether you will be there or not."

"I cannot go to-morrow," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Give the man a card and tell Magistrate Hsia that he must do all that is necessary."

"Brother," said the Lady of the Vase, "you must go to your office and not neglect your duties. Though I am dying I shall not be gone so soon."

"But I am going to stay and watch over you," Hsi-mên said. "I want you to keep firm hold on yourself and not let your thoughts bother you so much. Uncle Hua told me that I should get the boards for your coffin and so keep the evil ones away. When I have done so you will certainly begin to improve."

The Lady of the Vase nodded. "Very well," she said, "but don't let yourself be cheated. You must not spend more than ten taels on the wood. And, if you really look upon me as your wife, don't have my body burned, but lay me beside your dead wife. So, perhaps, I may benefit from some of the offerings made at her tomb. And do not spend too much money on those boards for my coffin. You have a great household and you must think of the future."

These words pierced Hsi-mên's heart as though they had been a sword. "Sister," he said, "why do you talk like this? Even if I were a poor man, I would not treat you so disgracefully."

Then the Moon Lady came with a small box of apples. "My sister-in-law has sent these specially for you," she said to the Lady of the Vase. She told Welcome Spring to wash and peel them.

"It is very kind of Mistress Wu," the Lady of the Vase said. When Welcome Spring had peeled some of them, she

cut them into slices, put them on a plate and tried to help the Lady of the Vase to eat one. But she could only suck it and spit it out. The Moon Lady was afraid they might be disturbing her, so she made her turn her face to the wall, and she and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went out to talk about her.

"I am afraid she is in a very bad way," the Moon Lady said. "You ought to go and buy some boards for her coffin before it is too late."

"So Brother Hua has just said, and I have spoken to her about it. She said I must not spend much money because I have so many people to provide for and I must think of the future. It went to my heart. But I think I will wait until the Priest P'an has been and then I'll see about the coffin."

"You don't realise the situation," the Moon Lady said. "Look how she has changed. She has lost appetite till she cannot even drink a drop of water. You still hope for her recovery. We must face the facts. If she does get better, we can give the coffin to somebody for charity. It will not cost us much."

"I will do what you say," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He went to the great hall and sent for Pên IV. "You know who has good coffin boards for sale," he said. "Go with Ch'ên Ching-chi, my son-in-law, and see if you can find a good set. Take the money with you."

"I believe that Captain Ch'ên, in the Main Street, has some good boards," Pên IV said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent for Ch'ên Ching-chi and said to him: "Go to the Great Lady and ask her for five pieces of silver. Then go to look at the boards with Pên IV." Ch'ên Ching-chi hurried away, got the money, and went out with Pên IV. In the afternoon they came back.

"We went to Ch'ên's place and looked at all the boards he has," Ching-chi said, "but we did not think them either particularly good or very cheap. On our way back we met Master Ch'iao. He told us that a scholar named Shang had a very fine set of boards. His father bought them at Ch'êng-tu in Ssü-ch'uan, where he used to be a judge. He brought them for his own lady. There were two sets originally and they have used one. They are of the kind known as 'Peach-Flower Cavern'. The set is complete in five pieces—sides, cover, top

and bottom. They are asking three hundred and seventy taels. We went with Master Ch'iao to see the set and it certainly is a very fine one. Master Ch'iao bargained with Scholar Shang for a long time and at last the scholar agreed to reduce his price by fifty taels. He would not have sold the boards at all, he said, if he had not wanted the money to pay for his expenses when he goes to the Capital next year to sit for the public examination."

"Take three hundred and twenty taels at once and secure the boards," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "There is no time to lose."

"He has taken two hundred and fifty taels as a deposit," Ching-chi said, "so that leaves us with seventy more to pay." They went again to the inner court and the Moon Lady gave them another seventy taels. Then they went to Master Shang's. That evening a number of porters brought the boards, carefully wrapped in red drugget. They set them down in the courtyard. Hsi-mên Ch'ing examined them and found them excellent. He sent for carpenters to saw them and the wood gave out a delightful fragrance. The main piece was about five inches thick, two feet five inches broad and seven feet five inches long. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was quite satisfied. He sent for Ying Po-chüeh to come and look at them and asked him if he had ever seen such a fine set of coffin boards in his life before. Po-chüeh expressed his admiration.

"A perfect example of the fitness of things!" he exclaimed. "Everything in the world has its proper owner somewhere. You have bought these boards for my sister-in-law, and it is clear evidence that she did well when she married you."

Hsi-mên said to the workmen: "Make these boards up carefully and you shall have five taels of silver." The workmen set to work with a will and soon had put the coffin together.

Ying Po-chüeh said to Lai Pao: "To-morrow morning go and see Priest P'an. If he will come, bring him with you. We must avoid all further delay." Then he stood with Hsi-mên Ch'ing and watched the carpenters working in the courtyard. It was the first night-watch before he went away.

"Come early to-morrow," Hsi-mên said to him. "The priest may be here early." Po-chüeh promised and went away.

In the evening, old woman Fêng and Nun Wang went to the Lady of the Vase's room. They had seen Hsi-mên Ch'ing

in the front court. They proposed to stay the night with the Lady of the Vase, but she would not allow them. "This is a foul place," she said, "and it would be disagreeable for you. Go and sleep somewhere else." Hsi-mên, seeing that the nun and the old woman were there, went to sleep with Golden Lotus.

The Lady of the Vase told Welcome Spring to fasten the corner door and bolt it. Then she said: "Take a light and open my chest." Welcome Spring took out some dresses and ornaments. The Lady of the Vase asked the nun to go nearer and gave her five taels of silver and a roll of silk.

"When I am dead," she said, "read the texts for me, you and a few other nuns."

"Lady," Nun Wang said, "you are looking too far ahead. Heaven will take pity on you and you will certainly get better."

"Keep the money," the Lady of the Vase said, "and say nothing about it to the Great Lady. Tell her I gave you the silk for the sacred offerings you made for me." Then she called old woman Fêng. "Old Fêng," she said, "you are my old nurse. You waited on me when I was a child. Now I am dying. I have nothing to give you but these old dresses and this pin. I give them to you as a keepsake. And here is some silver that you may buy yourself a coffin. You need have no anxiety. I will ask his Lordship to let you stay on in that house as caretaker. I'm sure he won't send you away."

Old woman Fêng took the silver and the clothes and knelt down. Weeping, she said: "This is the end of me. As long as you have lived I have always had someone to depend upon. If you die, I shan't know where to go."

Then the Lady of the Vase called the nurse and gave her a purple silk gown, a blue silk skirt, an old silk cloak, two gold-headed pins, and a silver ornament.

"You took care of my baby," she said, "and even when my baby died, I still hoped you might take care of another child of mine. I did not want you to leave me while I lived. But there is no hope for me now, and I am going to ask your master and mistress to keep you after my death, so that, if the Great Lady has a child, you may nurse it. I give you these clothes as a little token of remembrance. Do not think that I am mean."

Heart's Delight knelt down and kotowed. She cried. "I hoped that I might serve you always," she said. "You have always been so kind to me. And it is really my fault that the little master died and you are so ill. Please speak to the Great Lady for me. My husband is dead, and, if I am sent away from here, there is nowhere for me to go." Then Heart's Delight took the clothes and the ornaments and stood, drying her tears.

Now the Lady of the Vase summoned Welcome Spring and Hibiscus. They came and knelt down beside the bed. "You two have served me since your childhood. You have served me well, but there is little I can do for you now. You have already clothes enough and there is no need for me to give you more. Here, for each of you, are two pairs of gold pins and two gold flowers. As for you, Welcome Spring, your master has made a woman of you, so, of course, you will not leave here and I will ask the Great Lady to look after you. And you, Hibiscus, I will ask the Great Lady to find a good home for you, for I would not have you stay on here to be ill used by anyone else. I don't wish my maids to suffer when I am gone, and I don't think you will find anyone else as indulgent as I have been."

Hibiscus knelt and cried. "Mother," she sobbed, "I would like to stay here for ever."

"Oh, you silly maid! Whom will you serve when I have gone?"

"I will look after your tablet."

"My tablet will not be here for long. It will be burned and you will have to go away."

"Then I and Welcome Spring will both serve the Great Lady."

"That is one way," said the Lady of the Vase.

Hibiscus did not quite understand the situation. Welcome Spring took the ornaments and cried. She could not speak.

So the Lady of the Vase gave them all her last instructions. In the early morning, Hsi-mên Ch'ing came. She asked him about the coffin. "We bought the boards yesterday," he told her, "and the men are working on it now. Remember, it is to drive your illness away. When you get better, we shall give it away in charity."

"How much did it cost? I do not wish you to waste your money."

"Oh, not much," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "A hundred taels, or something like that."

"It is a great deal of money for so useless an end," the Lady of the Vase said. "Well, have it made up ready for my death."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went out to see the carpenters at work. The Moon Lady and Picture of Grace came to see her. It was clear that she was very ill indeed. "How do you feel to-day, Sister?" the Moon Lady asked.

The Lady of the Vase took her hand. "Mother," she said, "there is no hope for me."

The Great Lady wept. "Sister," she said, "is there anything you would like to say to me? Here is the Second Lady, too. Tell us both."

"I have nothing to say," the Lady of the Vase answered. "We have been sisters together for a few years and you have always been very kind to me. I had hoped we should grow old together, but the Fates were against me. My baby died, and now I am dying. When I am dead my two maids will be left. The older of them has already been made a woman and you will doubtless keep her in your apartments. As for the younger, keep her if you want her, but, otherwise, please find a young man for her and let her be free. I don't wish people to speak of her as a maid without a mistress. I say this because she has served me so long, and I shall be the easier after my death for telling you. Heart's Delight does not wish to leave, so, Mother, for the sake of the care she took of my baby and for my own sake, keep her to look after the child you will bear."

"Sister," said the Moon Lady, "think no more about any of these matters. I take them all upon myself. If you leave us, I will have Welcome Spring to live with me and Hibiscus shall wait upon the Second Lady. The maid the Second Lady has now is not as honest as she might be and she is lazy. One of these days I shall have to dismiss her. The nurse, Heart's Delight, as you have said, has nowhere else to go, and I will keep her whether I have a child or not. I will try and find a husband for her."

"Don't worry about any of these things," Picture of Grace

added. "The Great Lady and I will hold ourselves responsible. If Hibiscus comes to me, I will let her wait upon me, and treat her kindly."

The Lady of the Vase called the nurse and the two maids and bade them kotow to the two ladies. The Moon Lady began to cry again.

Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, and Beauty of the Snow then came to visit the Lady of the Vase and she said a few kind words to each of them. Then all but the Moon Lady went away. "Mother," the Lady of the Vase said to her softly, "if you bear a child, Mother, look carefully after him. Bring him up that he may continue the family after you. Do not be careless as I was, so that you suffer from the evil plottings of others."

"I understand, Sister," the Moon Lady said. These words made a great impression upon her, and, when Hsi-mên Ch'ing was dead, the remembrance of them was the reason why Golden Lotus was no longer allowed to live in the family.

While they were still talking, Ch'in T'ung came and said they must burn incense. Priest P'an had come. The Moon Lady told the maids to clean the room, make tea, get pure water, and burn some precious incense. She and the other women went to the inner room to listen to what the priest should say. Hsi-mên Ch'ing brought him in.

The priest came in by the corner door, past the screen. Before he entered the room where the Lady of the Vase was, he went backward two steps before the stairs. Then he murmured something; the servants raised the lattice, and he went in. He sat down beside the sick woman's bed. It seemed as if all his strength was concentrated in his two eyes; it was a sign that he was summoning all the power of spiritual vision at his command. He held a sword in his hand and his fingers were bent in a definite and peculiar position. He murmured again and it seemed as though his eyes saw through everything. Then he went to the other room and set out the table for incense. Hsi-mên Ch'ing burned some incense and the priest set fire to a charm. Then he cried:

"Come quickly, all ye spirits that serve!"

He cast round him a mouthful of water. Immediately there seemed to be a whirlwind of furious intensity outside the room,

and in the whirlwind some of the marshals of the host of angels.

"In this house of Hsi-mên," said the priest, "a woman, Li, is ill. She has appealed to me. I bid you, bring the guardian of the soil and the six tutelaries of this household. Bring them that I may examine them and learn the reason for this illness. Go then, forthwith, and delay not."

The priest closed his eyes. His colour changed and he sat stiffly upright. He put his hands on the table and hammered with a piece of wood as a judge does when he tries a case. This he did for a long time. Then he came out. Hsi-mên Ch'ing invited him to go to the outer court and tell what he had seen in his vision.

"This woman," the priest said, "is suffering the punishment that has been due to her for several generations. She has been accused in Hades and there is no devil's work here. I can do nothing."

"Master Priest," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "is there no sacrifice that you can offer?"

"Hatred and debt," said the priest, "always find their quarry. Even the officers of Hades themselves could do nothing." But when he saw how very much in earnest Hsi-mên Ch'ing was, he said: "How old is the lady?" Hsi-mên told him she was twenty-seven. "Well," said the priest, "I will offer sacrifice to the star of her life, and we shall see the manner of its burning." Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked when he would do so and what he would need.

"To-night, at the third night-watch," the priest said. "I shall need some white powder to mark the boundary. I shall make an altar and cover it with yellow silk. Then I shall arrange the stars according to their order and make an offering of five kinds of grain and soup and dates. I shall need neither meat nor wine. I shall need a lamp to represent the light of her life, and twenty-seven lanterns. I shall require an umbrella to cover the lanterns. That is all. You must fast, put on black clothes and come here to make your obeisance. I will offer the sacrifice. See that dogs and chickens are kept away, for I do not wish to be disturbed."

Hsi-mên went at once to get everything ready. He went to his study, bathed, and changed into clean clothes. He asked

Ying Po-chüeh to stay with him. They had a vegetarian meal with the priest and, about the third night-watch, the altar and the lanterns were made ready. The priest took his seat upon a dais with the altar of the lanterns below him. They were set out according to the position of the stars. Over everything were three large umbrellas and, round the dais, the master stars, twelve in number. Below them were the lanterns representing the life of the Lady of the Vase. These were twenty-seven in number.

The priest recited a preamble. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing, dressed in black clothes, came and knelt down. The servants all withdrew. None was allowed to remain. The lanterns were lighted. The priest sat on the seat, his head bent down, his sword in his hand. He murmured something, then gazed at the sky and set his feet in a certain position. Three times he burned incense that he might be granted knowledge of the three worlds. And every command he gave sounded like thunder. It was a bright clear night; the stars were shining in the heavens. Suddenly the whole world darkened and a mighty hurricane blew.

This is not the roaring of tigers
Or the muttering of dragons
But a wind that rushes through the doors
And round the screens
A wind that blasts the flowers, rips off the leaves
And drives the clouds to leave the mountains
And send rain to the ocean.
The wild geese have lost their mates and cry bitterly
The wild ducks and the herons are frightened
And seek trees for refuge.
The angel of the moon shuts her palace door in haste
And the immortal Lieh Tzū cries for help
Away in the sky.

Three times the wind blew. It was followed by an ice-cold blast that put out all the twenty-seven lamps. The priest saw a man in white garments and two black-robed attendants with him. They came, bringing a paper which they set down upon the table. The priest looked at it. It was the final judgment of Hades. There were three seals upon the paper. He came to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and said: "Your lady has sinned against

Heaven. Our prayers are useless. The light of her life has gone out. There is no hope, and death is not far distant from her.'

When he heard this, Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed his head and was silent. He wept. At last he said: "Teacher, you must help her."

"It is the will of Heaven," said the priest. "There is nothing I can do." He asked to be allowed to go. Hsi-mên Ch'ing urged him to stay the night. "Being a priest, to walk through the dew and pass the night upon the mountains is nothing to me," the priest said. Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not persuade him to stay. He told his servants to give the priest a roll of cloth and three taels of silver. "It is God's will that I should make use of the knowledge I possess," the priest said. "I have taken an oath that I will never take anything from the world. I cannot accept your gift." But, being pressed, he told a novice to accept the roll of cloth and make a gown for him. Before he left he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Sir, you must not go to her room to-night. If you go, you too will have trouble. Be cautious! Be cautious!" He went out of the gate and walked swiftly away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the courtyard. He saw that all the lanterns had been extinguished. This made him very sad and he wept before Ying Po-chüeh. "Brother, this is her destiny," Po-chüeh said. "We cannot take her back against the will of Heaven. You must not be so sad. The fourth night-watch has sounded." Then he said: "Brother, you are weary, go and rest. I will go away now and come again to-morrow morning."

"You must have a light," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He ordered Lai An to take a lantern and light Ying Po-chüeh home. Then he went back to his study. There he sat by himself with the light of a solitary candle. His heart was torn by distress and he could only sigh. He thought how the priest had said to him that he must not go to his loved one's room. "But how can I desert her now?" he said to himself. "I will go and see her even if I die for it. She may wish to say something to me." So he went to the sickroom.

The Lady of the Vase was sleeping with her face to the wall, but she wakened when she heard Hsi-mên Ch'ing. She turned

to him and said: "Brother, why have you come?" Then she asked him about the lanterns.

"Be easy in your mind," Hsi-mên said. "There was nothing wrong with the lanterns."

"Brother," the Lady of the Vase said, "do not try to deceive me. I saw him who is dead come with two others and stir up trouble for me again. He told me that you had sent for a priest to get me back from death. But, he said, the accusation against me in Hades had been accepted and I could not escape him. He went off in a raging fury and said: 'To-morrow I shall come and take you.'"

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sobbed aloud when he heard this. "Oh, Sister," he said, "do not worry about him. I had hoped that we should live long years together. I never thought you would go away and leave me. I would rather die myself. It would be better than this agony."

The Lady of the Vase put her hands upon Hsi-mên's neck. "Brother," she said, "I had longed to live with you always but now I am going away. Before I close my eyes I would say one thing to you. You have a great household and you alone can control it. You must always be careful and not do things without thinking. And be kind to the Great Lady. I know that one day soon she will bear a child to you, and he will carry on your family after you are gone. You are an officer now, but you must not go drinking so much as you have been doing. You must come home early. Your household affairs are of more importance than feasting. If I could have lived, I would have given you counsel. When I am dead, I fear there will be none to advise you."

These words cut Hsi-mên's heart like a sword. "Sister," he said, "I know it. But do not worry about me. Heaven has put an end to our happiness together. It will not permit us to be husband and wife any longer. This will kill me, even though it is the will of Heaven."

The Lady of the Vase spoke to him about Welcome Spring and Hibiscus. "I have spoken to the Great Lady," she said, "Welcome Spring is going to serve her, and Hibiscus the Second Lady. The Second Lady has promised me."

"Say no more of this, Sister," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Nobody shall send your maids away when you are dead. I

will not even allow the nurse to go. I mean them all to guard your tablet."

"What tablet?" said the Lady of the Vase. "There will be nothing but a wooden board and it will be burned thirty-five days after my death."

"Oh, no!" Hsi-mên said. "I shall keep it as long as I live and make offerings before it."

Then the Lady of the Vase said: "It is late now. Go and sleep."

"I don't wish to sleep," Hsi-mên answered her. "I am going to stay and look after you."

"I am not likely to die yet," the Lady of the Vase said, "and there is such a nasty mess here, it will make you sick. Besides, you will be in the way when the maids have to attend to me."

So Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the maids to look well after their mistress and went to the Moon Lady's room. He told the Moon Lady about the sacrifice, and said: "I have been to her room. She is still able to speak quite well. Perhaps Heaven will, even yet, allow her to get better."

"Her eyes are sunken, her lips are parched, and her ears burn," the Moon Lady said. "I fear there is no hope. She has the kind of illness in which she is able to talk up to the last moment."

"She has been in this house only a few years," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "and she has never harmed anyone, whether of high or low degree. And so sweet is her nature that she has never spoken an unkind word about anyone. I cannot bear to lose her." He cried, and the Moon Lady cried with him.

The Lady of the Vase asked Welcome Spring and the nurse to place her so that she faced the wall. Then she said: "What is the time?" The nurse told her:

"The cock has not yet crowed: it is the fourth night watch."

Welcome Spring put some new paper beneath her and they helped her over till she faced the wall. Then they pulled the bed-clothes over her. Everybody had been up all night. Old woman Fêng and Nun Wang at last went to sleep. Welcome Spring and Hibiscus put something on the floor and slept there. In less than an hour, Welcome Spring dreamed that the Lady of the Vase got out of bed and touched her. "Look after

my room," she said, "I am going now." Welcome Spring woke up with a start. The lamp was still burning on the table. She looked at the bed. The Lady of the Vase was there, facing the wall, but, when Welcome Spring put her hand over her mistress's mouth, she could feel no breath. She could not say when her lady had died.

So this beautiful and charming lady became a dream of the spring.

Welcome Spring quickly woke the others. They saw that the Lady of the Vase was dead. She was lying in a pool of blood. They were greatly excited and ran to the inner court to tell Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He and the Moon Lady hurried to the room as fast as they could. They lifted the bed-clothes. The Sixth Lady's face had not changed and there was still a little warmth in her body. There was a red stomacher about her. Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not trouble about the blood. He gathered her in his arms and kissed her.

"Oh, my ill-fated sister, my dear sweet sister! How could you leave me like this? I will die too. I know I have not long to live." He cried and threw himself into the air in his grief. The Moon Lady cried; Picture of Grace, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, and Beauty of the Snow, and the household, maids and nurse and all, cried, so that the sound of their crying shook the earth.

"We did not know when she was going to die," the Moon Lady said, "so we never dressed her properly."

"Her body is warm," Tower of Jade said, "I think she must have just gone. We must wait no longer but dress her now, while her body is limp."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing still held the Lady of the Vase in his arms. "Heaven wills my death," he was crying. "You have been in this house three years and not a single day's real pleasure have you had. It is all my fault."

This made the Moon Lady a little impatient with him. "Cry if you will, but put her down," she said. "You must not cry face to face with her like that. If the foul air from her mouth comes to you it will make you ill. And what do you mean by saying that she never had a single happy day? If she did not, who did? We ourselves cannot decide how long we shall live. We shall all have to go the same way." She bade Tower of

Jade and Picture of Grace take the key and get some clothes so that they might dress her. She told Golden Lotus to help dress her hair.

"Get the clothes she used to like best," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

The Moon Lady said to Picture of Grace and Tower of Jade: "Get that new scarlet silk gown, and the satin skirt of willow yellow, the clove-coloured silk dress and the light blue skirt she used to wear when she went to visit Mistress Ch'iao, and the dresses that were made for her lately."

Welcome Spring took a light and Tower of Jade the key, and they went to the room and opened a chest. After searching a long time they found the three dresses, a purple silk vest, a white silk underskirt and a scarlet undergarment, with white silk socks and a pair of drawers. Picture of Grace carried them to the Moon Lady who, with Golden Lotus, was dressing the dead woman's hair. They used four gold pins to keep in place a green kerchief.

"What kind of shoes must she have?" Picture of Grace asked.

"She used to like that scarlet pair with high heels," Golden Lotus said. "She did not wear them more than twice. Let us have those."

"No," said the Moon Lady, "I will not have red shoes put on her. It would look as though we wished her to jump into the fire of Hell. Bring the violet shoes with high heels which she wore when she went to her sister-in-law's place." Picture of Grace told Welcome Spring to bring those shoes. They all worked together dressing the Lady of the Vase.

Meanwhile, Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent the boys to the great hall. They took down the pictures and covered the screens. They got a large piece of board and carried it to the hall, then put a silken coverlet on the board and a paper cover over that. Then they prepared a table for incense and a lamp to be kept lighted continually. Hsi-mên Ch'ing appointed two boys to be with the body all the time, one to beat the gong, the other to keep paper offerings burning. Then he sent Tai An for Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang.

The Moon Lady took all the clothes which were to go with the dead woman into the coffin, and locked up the rooms that

had belonged to her. Only the bedroom was left unlocked. The maids and the nurse were placed in charge of it.

When old woman Fêng saw that her mistress was dead, tears rolled down her nose like a river. Nun Wang muttered texts for the soul of the Lady of the Vase. There was the *To Hsin Ching*, the *Yao Shih Ching*, the *Chieh Yüan Ching*, the *Lêng Yen Ching* and incantations to invoke the compassion of the Blessed One, that he might receive the dead lady's soul and set her on the right way in the realm of the dead.

In the great hall, Hsi-mên Ch'ing was beating his breast. He cried so much that he had no voice left, saying: "My kind, sweet sister!" It was nearly dawn.

Then the Master of the Yin Yang came. "I am sorry to hear of your lady's death," he said. "At what hour did she die?"

"We cannot say exactly," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him. "I only know that she went to sleep about the beginning of the fourth night-watch. Everybody was tired. There was no one awake when she died."

"It does not matter," the Master of the Yin Yang said. He asked a servant to give him a light. Then he lifted the paper coverlet. The fingers of the Lady of the Vase indicated the hour of the Ox.¹ "She died," he said, "two degrees after the fifth night-watch. We may say that she died at the hour of the Ox." Hsi-mên called for ink and brushes and asked Master Hsü to write the certificate. Hsü asked for the dead lady's name and her eight characters. Then he wrote:

The deceased lady Li, the wife of Hsi-mên, was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month in the year *Hsin Wei* of the reign *Yüan Yu*, and died at midnight on the seventeenth day of the ninth month in the year *Ting Yu* of the reign *Chêng Ho*. This was a *Ping Tzū* day, and the order of the month *Wu Hsü*. Her spirit is ten feet high. It will be useless to wail for her until the mourning dress has been worn. And, when she is put into her coffin, none should be present whose animal is the Dragon, the Tiger, the Cock, or the Snake, unless he is a kinsman.

The Moon Lady told Tai An to ask Master Hsü to look

¹ Between 1 and 3 a.m.

into his black book and tell them the destiny of the Lady of the Vase. The Master of the Yin Yang opened his secret book and said: "This was the hour of the Ox on a *Ping Tzū* day. If the departed goes to Heaven, she will go to the Palace of the Precious Vase, but if to the world again, then to the land of Ch'i. In a former existence she was born as a man named Wang in Pin-chou. As this man she killed a ewe with child, and, for that reason, her animal was the sheep. Though she married a rich man, she suffered much from illness and the backbitings of others. Her child lived for a very short time, and she has died from a combination of disease and anger. Nine days ago her soul went to a family named Yüan in K'ai-fêng Fu to be reborn as a girl. There she will suffer poverty, but, when she is twenty years old, she will marry a rich man, much older than herself. She will have an easy life and die when she is forty-two, again as the result of anger." He ended his reading of the black book. The ladies all sighed.

The Moon Lady inquired what would be a suitable day for the funeral. Hsü asked how long they wished to keep the body at the house.

"I cannot let her go yet," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, crying. "She must not be buried for thirty-five days, at least."

"If you keep her thirty-five days," Hsü said, "there will be no day suitable. But after twenty-eight days there is one. I suggest that you have her grave dug about noon on the eighth day of the tenth month and bury her on the twelfth, about the hour of two. Both those days are suitable from every point of view."

"Very well," Hsi-mên said, "we will have the funeral on the twelfth day of the tenth month."

The Master of the Yin Yang wrote out his certificate and placed it on the dead woman's body. Then he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "About the hour of the Dragon¹ on the nineteenth, we will put her in her coffin. Please have everything ready." Then he went away. It was now broad daylight.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'i T'ung to get a horse and ride to tell Uncle Hua. Then he sent servants in all directions to give the news to his relatives, and a man to the office to ask for leave of absence. He sent Tai An to Lion Street for twenty

rolls of thin white cloth and thirty rolls of coarser material. He told Tailor Chao to bring a number of assistant tailors and set to work in the rooms beside the hall to make hangings and curtains and table-cloths for the funeral, skirts and gowns for all the ladies, and a long gown of white cloth for every servant. He gave Pên IV a hundred taels of silver and sent him to buy thirty rolls of linen and two hundred rolls of yellow funeral silk. He sent for the arbour builders to make a great arbour in the courtyard.

Hsi-mên never ceased thinking of the Lady of the Vase, her appearance and her actions. Suddenly he thought of having a portrait of her painted. He summoned Lai Pao and said to him: "Where can we find a good artist to paint her portrait?"

Lai Pao said: "Once a man named Han painted some screens for us. He used to be employed in the Imperial Household. He was dismissed but he paints excellent portraits."

"If you know where he lives," Hsi-mên said, "bring him here at once." Lai Pao went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing had not slept all night. What with his grief and what with the strain he had had, he became very irritable about the fifth night-watch. He cursed the maids and kicked the boys. Still he remained in the great hall watching his wife's body. From time to time he sobbed aloud. Tai An was there too, and he cried bitterly. The Moon Lady, Picture of Grace, Tower of Jade, and Golden Lotus busied themselves distributing mourning to the maids and serving-women behind the curtain. They could hear Hsi-mên Ch'ing still crying though he had no voice left. They asked him if he would take some tea, but he would not answer.

"She is dead," the Moon Lady said to him, "and you will not bring her back to life by crying. You have not slept properly for several nights; you have not combed your hair or washed your face. This morning you have worked very hard and have had nothing at all to eat. It would be more than anybody could stand even if he were made of iron. Go and do your hair, and have something to eat. We will attend to things. You are not very strong and, if you have to take to your bed, I don't know what we shall do."

"He has not dressed his hair or washed his face," Tower of Jade said.

"A moment ago," the Moon Lady told her, "I sent a boy to ask him to do so, but he kicked the boy out, and I dare not ask him again."

Then Golden Lotus spoke. "You may not know it, but a short time ago, I spoke to him quite kindly. I said, 'If you cry like this you will lose your flesh and your bones too. You must eat something. You can see about things afterwards.' He opened his red eyes wide and called me a swine, of a woman. I shan't bother about him any more. The unreasonable fellow! There's nothing swinish about me. And he always talks about others upsetting him!"

"She died so suddenly that he is naturally rather upset," the Moon Lady said, "but he should keep the sorrow in his heart and not make such a fuss about it. You saw, dead though she was, he didn't care. He kissed her and cried so loud. Really, it is not good breeding. She had been here for three years, he said, and had never had a single day's happiness. I have no recollection of her ever having had to draw water or do any other hard work day by day."

"He loved her more than any of us," Tower of Jade said, "but he was right. Such a woman as our Sixth Sister was!"

As they were talking, Ch'ên Ching-chi came with nine rolls of white silk. "This silk," he said, "Father tells me, is for kerchiefs and skirts."

"Ask your father to come and have some food," the Moon Lady said to him as she took the silk, "he has had nothing to eat."

"I dare not," Ching-chi said. "When a boy went to ask him, he nearly killed him. I dare not go near him."

"If you won't go, I shall have to send somebody else."

After a while she called Tai An and said to him: "Your father has not had anything to eat, and he has been crying so long. Take him some food. Master Wên is there now; try and get your father to have something to eat with him."

"We have been for Uncle Ying and Uncle Hsieh," the boy said. "As soon as they come we will take some food in. They need only say a word or two and, I promise you, Father will eat something."

"You cunning young rogue," the Moon Lady said. "You are the worm in your father's stomach. It looks as though we

poor old women are not as good as you are. How do you know he will eat when they come?"

"You don't realise, Mother, what good friends they are with Father. Whenever he gives a party, no matter who else is there, they are sure to be invited. If Father has three ch'iens' worth of food to eat, so have they; if he has only two ch'iens' worth, they have it just the same. However bad a temper he may be in, they have only to speak a few words, and he is laughing and smiling again."

Ch'i T'ung brought Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh Hsi-ta. They went in, knelt down before the body, and wept for a long time. They bewailed their kind sister-in-law. Golden Lotus said: "The rascally oily-mouthed rogues! So we are not kind!" Then they stood up. Hsi-mên Ch'ing made a reverence to them and they cried again.

"How unhappy you must be, Brother," they said. They were asked to go to a room in the wing. There they greeted Master Wên and sat down.

"When did my sister-in-law die?" Po-chüeh asked.

"It was some time about the hour of the Ox," Hsi-mên told them.

"It was after the fourth night-watch when I got home," Po-chüeh said. "My wife asked after her, and I said: 'By Heaven's will, the poor lady is at the point of death.' As soon as I went to sleep, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed you sent a boy to fetch me. He said you were giving a feast in your house to celebrate your promotion. I came at once. You were wearing scarlet robes. You took two jade pins from your sleeve and showed them to me. 'One is broken', you said. I looked at them for a long time and then I said: 'It is a pity the broken one is made of jade while the other is only crystal. 'But you said: 'No, they are both made of jade.' I woke up feeling that the dream boded no good. My wife saw me sucking my lips and asked me whom I thought I was talking to. I said: 'You don't understand. Wait, and, when the dawn comes, I'll tell you.' Then the day broke and I saw your boy coming dressed in white. It was a shock, but here you are wearing mourning dress."

"I too had a dream," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "it was rather like yours. I dreamed that my kinsman Chai of the Eastern

Capital sent me six pins. One of them was broken, and I said: 'What a pity!' Then I woke up. I was just telling my wife about the dream when she in the front court died. What an unkind Heaven to bring such a calamity upon me. I would rather have died myself. I only lost sight of her for a moment, and at that moment she died. Even in years to come, how shall I think of her without my heart breaking? I have never wronged anyone, why should Heaven snatch my loved ones from me? First my child is taken, now she lies here, dead. What have I to live for in this world? Even if my money reached to the North Star, what use is it to me?"

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "it is no use talking like this. You and she were such a perfect couple that, of course, you cannot help feeling miserable now that she has died so suddenly. But you have a fine home; you have an official appointment, and you have a houseful of people dependent upon you. If anything should happen to you, what would become of them? Remember the old saying: 'If one lives, three live; but if one dies, three die.' Brother, you are an intelligent man and I do not need to tell you this. If you loved your wife dearly and you wish to do justice to that love, send for the Buddhist and the Taoist priests to read their dirges, and give her a splendid funeral. Then you will be easy in your mind because you will know that you have done well by my sister-in-law. I don't believe that there is anything else you can usefully do. You must see this, Brother."

Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing realised the situation and stopped crying. The servants brought tea and they drank it. Hsi-mên told Tai An to go to the inner court. "Bring some food," he said, "and I will eat it with your uncles and Master Wên."

"Haven't you had anything to eat yet?" Po-chüeh asked.

"I have been busy all the time since you went away, and I haven't had a bite of anything."

"It was foolish of you," Po-chüeh said. The proverb says: 'It is better to lose money than to be starved.' The dead are dead; the living must go on living. You must think of yourself."

Chapter Sixty-three

THE SIXTH LADY'S FUNERAL

His loved one is gone
Darkly, darkly.
He thinks of her so far away
Bitterly, bitterly.
The realms of light and darkness are ten thousand miles apart
Each has its own sun, its own moon.

He seems to see her in the play
But the day is late.
So long have they been parted, he cannot tell
Whether his dream is true
When he dreams of her.

HSI-MÊN CH'ING dried his tears and sent a boy to the inner court to ask for food. The two brothers Wu came. They made obeisance before the body, then greeted Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and expressed their sympathy. Hsi-mên took them to the room in the wing and they sat down with the others.

Tai An, when he came to the inner court, said to the Moon Lady: "Mother, you ladies would not believe me. Now that Uncle Ying has come, a few words from him have made Father ask for something to eat."

"Oh, yes, you cunning little rogue," Golden Lotus said, "you are always acting as a go-between for him, so of course you know him well."

"I have served my master ever since I was a child," Tai An said, "I can't help knowing what is in his mind."

"Who is with him now?" the Moon Lady asked.

"The two uncles have just come," the boy said. "Master Wên is there, Uncle Ying, Uncle Hsieh, Clerk Han and brother-in-law. There are eight of them all together."

"Ask your brother-in-law to come here to have something to eat," the Moon Lady said. "Why should he have to join that crowd?"

"He has already sat down," Tai An said.

The Moon Lady told him to take some other boys and go to

the kitchen for food. "Take some porridge for him," she said, "I don't suppose he had any rice this morning."

"But who is there to go with me?" Tai An said. "I am the only one at home. Some of the boys have gone shopping, and others have gone with messages about our lady's death. Wang Ching has gone to Chang's place to borrow a funeral gong."

"What about Shu T'ung? Are you afraid of upsetting his dignity?"

"Shu T'ung and Hua T'ung are both in the death-chamber. One is beating the gong, the other attending to the burning of incense and paper offerings. Father sent Ch'un Hung with Pên IV to change some silk. He didn't like the silk they brought. He is going to pay six ch'iens a roll."

"I should have thought five ch'iens a roll was quite enough," the Moon Lady said. "Why should he change it? Go and get Hua T'ung and take the food to them at once. Don't waste time like this."

Tai An and Hua T'ung carried large plates and large bowls to the outer court and set them out on a square table. While the men were eating, P'ing An came with a large card. "His Lordship Hsia has sent his secretary and a guard of honour to do your bidding," he said. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to inspect them and gave orders that the man should be given three ch'iens of silver and a card of thanks with the name in mourning. He asked the man to express his thanks to Hsia.

They had finished their meal and everything was cleared away when the artist Han, whom Hsi-mên Ch'ing had sent for, came. Hsi-mên greeted him and said: "May I trouble you to paint a portrait for me?" Han said he would do his best.

"You must not be too long setting to work," Uncle Wu said. "Her appearance may change."

"That does not matter in the least," Han said, "I can paint it without seeing her if necessary."

When they had finished their tea, P'ing An said that Uncle Hua had come. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Hua Tzū-yu went together before the body and cried there. Then they greeted each other and sat down with the rest. Uncle Hua asked when the Lady of the Vase had died.

"It was about the hour of the Ox when she breathed her last," Hsi-mên said. "She spoke quite sensibly up to the last."

She went quietly to sleep and, when the maid got up to look at her, she was dead."

Uncle Hua saw the artist and a boy carrying a palette. He was taking brushes and colours from his sleeve. "I see you are having her portrait painted," Hua Tzŭ-yu said.

"I loved her so much that I must have one," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "It will remind me of her whenever I look at it."

He warned all the womenfolk to withdraw. Then the curtain was raised and Hsi-mên Ch'ing took the artist, Uncle Hua and the others to the death-chamber. The artist put aside the coverings, and looked at the Lady of the Vase. A green handkerchief was bound about her head. Though she had been ill so long, her face still seemed as beautiful as when she was alive. Her pale yellow cheeks and her scarlet lips were as delightful as ever. Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not help weeping again. Lai Pao and Ch'in T'ung stood beside the artist with his brushes and colours. Han looked once only, but that was enough for him. Those who were standing around asked him to begin his painting. "Sir," Ying Po-chüeh said, "you will bear in mind that this is the face of an invalid. When she was in health, the lady's face was rounder. She was very beautiful."

"I need not trouble you for instructions," the artist said, "I think I know. May I ask if this is not the lady who went to the temple on the first day of the fifth month? I saw her then."

"Yes," Hsi-mên said, "at that time she was still quite well. If you can remember her, paint two portraits, one full length and one half length. Then we can make our offerings before her picture. I will give you a roll of silk and ten taels of silver."

"I will do my best," the artist said. He sketched out a half-length figure, and it looked very handsome, the flesh like jade and almost fragrant. He showed them the sketch and they thought it very good indeed.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had examined it he told Tai An to take it and show it to the ladies. "Let them see whether they think it good or not," he said. "If there is any little point they don't like about it, they have only to say so and it shall be put right."

Tai An took the sketch to the inner court. "Father told me to bring this to you," he said. "He says if there is anything

about it that seems to you not exactly like the Sixth Lady, you must say so, and he will get the artist to correct it."

"This seems to me very unnecessary," the Moon Lady said. "We do not know where the dead woman has gone. What need was there to have a portrait painted?"

"And where are the children to kotow before it?" Golden Lotus said. "I suppose, when all six of us are dead, he will have six portraits made."

Tower of Jade and Picture of Grace examined the picture. "Mother," they said, "it looks bright and life-like, but the lips seem rather flat."

"Yes," said the Moon Lady, looking at it, "and the left side of her brow is not quite high enough. Her eyebrows were more curved. But how could the man draw such a picture when he had only glanced at her dead body?"

"He saw the Sixth Lady at the temple once and he has drawn her chiefly from memory," Tai An told them.

Then Wang Ching came and asked the ladies if they had done with the portrait: his master wished to have it back. "Master Ch'iao has come," the boy said, "and he is anxious to see it."

Tai An took the picture back to the outer court and told the artist that the ladies thought the lips too flat and the eyebrows not sufficiently arched. They thought, too, that the left side of the forehead was not high enough. Han said: "I can easily put that right." He took his brush and corrected the sketch. Then he showed it to Master Ch'iao.

"A fine portrait!" Ch'iao said. "It only lacks breath."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was perfectly satisfied. He offered the artist three cups of wine, and entertained him. Then he gave him a roll of silk and ten taels of silver, telling him to finish the half-length portrait first, because he wished to put that up at once, and to complete the larger one in time for the funeral. Both were to be painted in green with ceremonial head-dress and robes. They were to be on silk and the rollers were to have ivory ends. The artist took the silver and told his boy to bring his things. Then he went away.

Master Ch'iao and the others went to look at the coffin. It was now finished. "I suppose that the informal ceremony of encoffining will take place to-day?" he said.

"Yes," said Hsi-mên, "the undertakers are coming and we shall have the informal ceremony to-day. The formal ceremony will take place three days hence."

Ch'iao finished his tea and went away. Then the undertakers came. They rolled up the papers and set out the clothes. Hsi-mên Ch'ing himself performed the rite of 'lighting the eyes' for the Lady of the Vase, and appointed Ch'ên Ching-chi to take the part of her son and dry them for her. He took a bright pearl and put it into her mouth. So the informal ceremony was performed. The body was set up again, and the whole household bewailed the dead woman. Lai Hsing had ordered various things to be made at the paper shop, four sets of gilt-paper offerings, a washing-basin, towels, combs, and figurines. These were set on either side of the body. Before it were incense-burners, vases, candlesticks and incense-boxes which the metal smiths had made. They were placed upon a table and looked very fine and bright. Ten taels of silver were given to the silversmith to make three sets of silver goblets.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Ying Po-chüeh to look after the account-books and records for the funeral. He gave out five hundred taels of silver and a hundred strings of coppers. Clerk Kan was detailed to keep the accounts; Pên IV and Lai Hsing, to buy what was necessary and keep in touch with the kitchen. Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Master Wên and Clerk Kan were to act in turn as ushers. Ts'ui Pên's duty was to attend to the accounts for the purchase of mourning. Lai Pao was to have charge of the temporary stores, Wang Ching to attend to the cellar, and Ch'un Hung and Hua T'ung were to be in attendance at the coffin. P'ing An and the soldiers of the guard were to sound the funeral gong, and bring incense and paper offerings for the guests who came. A writer and four soldiers were detailed to keep the visitors' book at the gateway, to see that the dates were correctly given when the religious ceremonies took place, and to hold the canopies and banners.

These orders were written on a sheet of paper and posted upon a screen, and all the different members of the household went about the duties that were appointed them.

Eunuch Hsüeh sent men with sixty long poles, thirty

bamboos, three hundred pieces of matting, and a hundred hempen ropes. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave the man who brought them five ch'ien of silver and a card of thanks for his master. He gave orders that a great shelter should be set up, which was to have a lofty centre-ridge and an entrance on either side. In the middle was to be a screen: in front of it a kitchen, and behind, a smaller shelter about the size of three rooms. Outside the great gateway was to be another temporary building, seven rooms wide.

Twelve priests from the Temple of Thanksgiving were summoned to sing the dirge. Two servants each day were to be employed doing nothing else but serve tea and water.

Uncle Hua and the younger Wu went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Master Wên to compose an obituary notice to be printed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him to write: "My humble wife has died." Master Wên wrote it without comment, then showed it to Ying Po-chüeh.

"This will not do at all," Ying Po-chüeh said. "It is contrary to polite usage. His wife is still alive and, if this is sent out in the way he wishes, people will talk. Uncle Wu, especially, will be offended. Don't do anything about it for the moment. I will speak to him later." They sat down again with Hsi-mên Ch'ing and, after a while, Ying Po-chüeh went away.

That evening, Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not go to the inner court. He had a bed set up beside the body of the Lady of the Vase, put a screen around the bed, and so passed the night alone. The two boys Ch'un Hung and Shu Tung attended him. The next morning he got up and went to the Moon Lady's room to wash. He dressed in a white hat and gown, with white shoes, white socks, and a white girdle.

Magistrate Hsia came to offer his condolences. When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had greeted him, Master Wên came and they had tea together. When the magistrate went out and passed through the gate, he bade the writer do his work well and keep an eye on the soldiers of the guard. If any of them should absent himself, word must be brought him and he would have the man punished. When he had given these instructions he mounted his horse and rode home.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Master Wên to send out invitations

for the funeral and sent servants round to ask the relatives to come on the third day after the death.

In the afternoon the temple servants came and set out the place for the ceremony. They hung up pictures of Buddha and made other preparations.

When the news was brought to Silver Maid, she got into a sedan-chair and came to bewail and burn paper offerings. She kotowed to the Moon Lady and said, weeping: "How sorry I am that nobody told me sooner. I never knew my Sixth Mother was dead. It has upset me terribly."

"You were her ward," Tower of Jade said, "and you ought to have come as soon as you knew that she was ill."

"Good Lady," Silver Maid said, "I swear I had no idea. If I had known, I should certainly have come."

"Well," said the Moon Lady, "whether you came or whether you did not, she did not forget you. She left a keepsake for you and I have put it aside." She told Tiny Jade to get the things that the Lady of the Vase had left for Silver Maid. Tiny Jade went to the inner room. When the parcel was opened it was found to contain silken dresses, two gold pins, and a golden flower. Silver Maid looked at them and cried so bitterly that her tears fell like drops of rain.

"If I had only known that she was ill," she cried, "I would have come to wait on her." She thanked the Moon Lady. The Moon Lady gave her tea and asked her to stay until the third day after the death.

On the third day the priests beat their gongs and chanted a dirge. Paper money was hung up and everyone in the household put on mourning clothes. Ch'ên Ching-chi, dressed in the deepest mourning, made obeisance before the pictures of Buddha. Neighbours, friends, kinsmen and the gentlemen from the office came to offer their sympathy and to make paper offerings. Not a few indeed made special offerings. Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, was there early. When the great offering was over, the body was lifted into the coffin. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked the Moon Lady for four more complete dresses to put into the coffin. In each corner of it was placed a piece of silver.

"Brother-in-law," Hua Tzū-yu said, "I should leave the silver out. Neither gold nor silver will stay there long."

But Hsi-mên Ch'ing would not listen. He insisted on placing the silver in the coffin. Then the board of the seven stars was placed in position and the lid of the coffin put in its place. The undertakers nailed it down with 'longevity' nails on every side, and all the people cried aloud. Hsi-mên Ch'ing cried so much that he seemed demented. "Oh, my sweet sister," he sobbed repeatedly, "I shall never see you again." It was long before they finished their lamentations. They entertained Master Hsü with vegetarian dishes and he went away.

All the people belonging to the household and all who served in the shop wore mourning, and the incense wafted from the gate seemed like a white cloud. Master Wên acted as Master of the Ceremonies and Tu, a writer of the Great Secretariate, came to write the Sixth Lady's name upon the banner. Tu's name was Tzŭ-ch'un. In the reign *Chên Tsung* he had been an official at the Ning Ho palace, but now he was living in retirement. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had sent a present of gold and silk and asked him to come. Special delicacies were prepared for his refreshment. When he arrived, Hsi-mên offered him three cups of wine, and Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên sat down to keep him company. A piece of red silk was set before him, and upon this he was to write the obituary title for the dead lady.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing wished him to write: 'The coffin of the Lady of Hsi-mên, Captain of the Royal Guard.'

"But we can't say that," Po-chüeh objected. "The 'lady' is still alive."

"This lady bore a son," Master Tu said. "It is perfectly in order. There can be no possible objection to the title."

They discussed the matter for some time and finally decided to write 'wife' instead of 'lady'.

"Lady is the word used to designate one of official rank," Master Wên said, "and 'wife' one who lives in your apartments. Both are commonly used in a very wide sense."

Master Tu wrote the inscription in white, except for the word 'Royal' which he wrote in gold. Then the silken banner was hung before the coffin and Tu was asked to write the tablet. Afterwards, Hsi-mên Ch'ing thanked him very heartily, entertained him with food and wine, and he went away.

The same day, Master Ch'iao and the three uncles, Wu, Hua and Shên, came to make their offering of the three carcasses. Mistress Ch'iao, Aunt Hua, and the two ladies Wu came in sedan-chairs to express their condolences. They wailed before the coffin, and the Moon Lady and the others cried with them. Then they were asked to go to the inner court and there given tea and something to eat. They were all dressed in mourning, Uncle Hua and his wife in very deep mourning. Cassia had been sent word and she came in a sedan-chair to make paper offerings. When she found Silver Maid there, she said: "When did you come? Why didn't you tell me? You are a fine one, always looking out for yourself."

"I did not know my mother was dead," Silver Maid said. "If I had known, I should have been here before this." The Moon Lady took them to the inner court and entertained them there.

The seventh day came. Sixteen priests came from the Temple of Thanksgiving. Priest Lang was in charge of them and presided over the ceremony. They recited the Lotus Sūtra and performed the ritual for the dead. The relatives, friends, and those who served in the shops, attended again. Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade King came to make an offering, and also to secure an invitation for the second week's mind. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him to stay and gave him vegetarian food.

A boy came and said: "The artist has brought the portrait." Everybody examined it. The painting showed the Lady of the Vase in a golden ceremonial head-dress, wearing pearl ornaments and a scarlet embroidered gown. Her face was as fair as though she lived. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted. He set the picture up beside the coffin and everybody said that the only thing it lacked was breath. Hsi-mên entertained the artist and asked him to take even more pains with the large portrait.

"Be assured that I will take the utmost care over it," said the artist. Hsi-mên gave him a handsome present and he went away.

About noon, Master Ch'iao came to make his offering. He brought a pig, a sheep, and other things for sacrifice, gold and silver mountains, and paper offerings of all sorts,

paper money and incense. There were fifty loads in all, and they created a great impression as they were brought with carriages and music. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi, standing before the body, made reverence in return. Then Master Ch'iao invited Scholar Shang, President Chu, Uncle Wu, Scholar Liu, Captain Hua, and his relative Tuan, one after the other to offer incense. When the three offerings had been made, they all knelt down on the floor to hear the Master of the Yin Yang read the panegyric:

On the twenty-second day of the ninth month of the seventh year of the reign *Chêng Ho*, Ch'iao Hung and the other relatives, with all due reverence, offer the stiff-bristled and the soft-haired animals and other sacrifice of food before the coffin of the deceased lady, the wife of Hsi-mên, and there bewail her loss.

The deceased lady was generous and kind. She managed her household prudently. She governed those in subjection to her with sympathy and good-will. She was, in truth, the very acme of perfection in womanhood and her good fame was on the lips of all who lived about her. Most glorious of women, most fragrant of blossoms!

When she married, she lived in absolute harmony with her lord. To him she bore a son with the brightness of a river pearl. We trusted that they might live together in married blessedness until a ripe old age, but, suddenly, she fell ill and vanished like a dream.

How shall we restrain our grief when we realise the departure of a lady so estimable? My little daughter is still in her mother's arms, yet she is the bond between this departed lady and ourselves. It was the will of heaven that the marriage should never be consummated. We must live in different worlds and we shall never meet again.

With this cup I would express all my love and sincerity. May she who is gone, know this, come, and enjoy it!

After this offering, the gentlemen were taken to the temporary building and entertained. Then the ladies came. Mistress Ch'iao, Mistress Ts'ui, President Chu's wife, Scholar Shang's wife and Miss Tuan came to make their offering to the dead. Drums and gongs were beaten and a number of

dancers dressed as spirits performed before the coffin. The Moon Lady accompanied the ladies and afterwards took them to the inner court and gave them tea. Then they were entertained.

While Hsi-mên Ch'ing was drinking with the others, he suddenly heard the funeral gong being sounded, and a servant hurried in to say that the prefect Hu had come and his sedan-chair was waiting at the gate. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, wearing his mourning robes, went to the coffin to await his guest, and asked Master Wên to dress and go to receive the prefect. Servants came in with incense and paper offerings, and, behind them, the prefect in plain dress and gold-buckled girdle. A number of officials followed him, some to hold his robes, others to adjust his girdle, and so on. When the prefect came to the coffin, Ch'un Hung knelt and offered him incense. The prefect took it and burned it before the body, twice making a reverence.

"I pray your Excellency to rise," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I am very grateful to you." He made reverence in return.

"I only heard yesterday that your lady had died," the prefect said. "I am sorry I come so late."

"My wife's illness was incurable," Hsi-mên said. "It is very good of you to come."

Master Wên was with them. They went to the hall and offered the prefect a cup of tea. Then he went away, Master Wên accompanying him to the gate.

That day the people who came to make offerings to the dead did not leave until the evening. The next day Moonbeam came and burned paper offerings before the coffin. The Moon Lady saw that the girl made an offering of eight plates of cakes and three of other refreshments and she called for a white silk skirt for the girl. Cassia and Silver Maid each made an offering of three ch'ien. The Moon Lady told Hsi-mên Ch'ing and he said: "Give each of them a silk skirt, no matter what they offer." The Moon Lady took them to the inner court and there they had tea. In the evening, a number of friends and kinsmen came to spend the night. A troop of actors had been engaged and were waiting to perform their plays. Li Ming, Wu Hui, Chêng Fêng and Chêng Ch'un were with them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had fifteen tables arranged

for his guests in the temporary building. Master Ch'iao was there, the two uncles Wu, Uncle Hua, Uncle Shên, Uncle Han, the two scholars Ni and Wên, Dr Jên, Li and Huang, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Chu Shih-nien, Sun Kuo-tsui, Pai Lai-kuang, Ch'ang Chih-chieh, the clerks Fu, Han, and Kan, Pên IV, the two nephews of Wu Shun, and six or seven others. The tables were all large, and more than ten great candles were lighted. The ladies were near the coffin, hidden from the view of the guests by screens and hangings, but so that they could watch the play.

All the guests made reverence to the dead and Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi made reverence in return. Then everybody sat down and the actors and musicians began to play. The first play was the Romance of Wei Kao and Flute of Jade, and their betrothal in two generations. First upon the stage came the hero Wei Kao and sang, then the heroine, Flute of Jade, and she sang, too. The cooks brought soup and rice and meat and goose. Ying Po-chüeh said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "I hear that the three young ladies from the bawdy-house are here. Why not ask them to come and offer a cup of wine to Master Ch'iao and the two Masters Wu? It is too great an indulgence to let them simply stay and listen to the play."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing would have told Tai An to bring the girls, but Ch'iao said: "We can't do that. They have come to make offering to the dead and we can't ask them to serve wine."

"Sir," Po-chüeh said, "you are mistaken. Little whores of their sort must not be allowed to be idle." He turned to Tai An. "Go at once and drag them out. Tell them: Uncle Ying says that, although you have come to pay your due respects to the Sixth Lady, you must come and do something for us as well."

Tai An went, but he soon came back. "They say they will not come if Uncle Ying is here."

"In that case I must go myself," Po-chüeh said. He stood up, walked two steps and sat down again.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Why have you come back?" he said.

"I had it in mind to go myself and fetch those little whores," Po-chüeh said. "But wait till I think what I'm going to say

and then I'll go and let them have a piece of my mind." After a while he told Tai An to go again and ask them.

The three girls came slowly. They were all wearing white silk gowns and blue skirts. They greeted the company, then stood smiling.

"Since we are here, why didn't you come at once?" Po-chüeh asked them. They did not answer. They served all the gentlemen with wine and then sat down together at one table. The music began again. Wei Kao and Pao Chih-pên had come together to Flute of Jade's house and her mother had come out to welcome them.

Pao Chih-pên said: "Go and fetch the girl out," and the old woman replied:

"Master Pao, you are lacking in courtesy. My daughter is not at every man's disposal. You should say, not: 'Fetch her out,' but, 'Please ask her if she will be so good as to come out.'"

This made Cassia laugh. "Master Pao," she said, "was like Beggar Ying. He did not know how to behave."

"You little whore," Po-chüeh said, "if I don't know how to behave, why is your mother so much attached to me?"

"She is attached to you the other way round," said Cassia.

"Attend to the play," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to them. "If you talk any more you will have to be fined." Po-chüeh kept silence.

The play went on. In the great hall, on one side of the large screen, sat the two aunts Wu, Aunt Yang, old woman P'an, another Aunt Wu, Aunt Mêng, Miss Chêng and Miss Tuan, with the ladies of Hsi-mên's household. On the other side were Plum Blossom, Flute of Jade, Fragrance, Welcome Spring and Tiny Jade. They stood in a group and watched the play. A maid passed with a plate of fruits and a pot of tea. Plum Blossom stopped her and said: "For whom are you taking the tea?"

"The ladies on the other side want some," the maid replied.

Plum Blossom took a cup for herself. Tiny Jade had observed that the girl in the play was called Flute of Jade. She took hold of her fellow maid and said to her: "You little whore! See, two men have come to visit you, and your wicked old woman wishes you to welcome them. Why don't you go?" She pushed Flute of Jade and she stumbled over Plum

Blossom. Plum Blossom was holding the cup of tea in her hands and she spilled it over her clothes.

"What are you doing, spilling the tea all over me!" Plum Blossom cried. "It is only a matter of luck that you didn't make me break the teacup."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing heard the noise and sent Tai An to see who was making it. The boy saw Plum Blossom sitting on a chair. "Go and tell our master," she said, "that that whore Flute of Jade got quite out of control when she saw the man on the stage."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing heard what was said, but he was too much occupied to think about it. The Moon Lady came and scolded Flute of Jade. "What have you been doing here all this time?" she said. "You ought to have gone to see who is in my room. Do you know who is there?"

"Yes," Flute of Jade said, "your daughter has gone to the inner court and the two nuns are in our room."

"There is always trouble if I let you stay and watch the plays," the Moon Lady said.

Then Plum Blossom, seeing the Moon Lady, rose and said: "Mother, you might think they were crazy. They seem to have forgotten both their senses and their manners. They laugh and talk and never trouble in the least whether the guests see them or not."

The Moon Lady scolded them again and went back to her place.

Master Ch'iao and Scholar Ni were the first to go away. Uncle Shên, Uncle Han and Dr Jên were about to follow their example, but Ying Po-chüeh stopped them. "Host," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, "you must speak to them. I am only a friend, but I am not going yet. They are your relatives and they ought to stay. Uncle Shên lives within the walls. Even if Uncles Han and Hua and Doctor Jên live outside the city, it is so late now that they can't get out, so what's the use of their hurrying? Come back all of you and sit down. Besides, the play is not finished."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the boys to get four jars of *Ma Ku* wine. When it was brought he said: "We won't keep this any longer." He took a large cup, set it before Uncle Wu

and said: "He who tries to break up this party shall be punished by Uncle Wu." So they all sat down again, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing bade Shu T'ung tell the actors to perform the most lively part of their play. The music began, and one of the actors came to ask whether they should play the scene in which the portrait is painted. "I don't care what it is," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but let it be something lively."

The girl, Flute of Jade, again appeared upon the stage. While she was singing, 'Never more shall I see you in this world, so I make this portrait of you,' Hsi-mên suddenly thought of all the suffering through which the Lady of the Vase had gone, and he was moved to tears. He took a handkerchief from his sleeve and dried his eyes. Golden Lotus saw him with her cold eyes. "Look at that rascal," she said to the Moon Lady, and pointed to him, "he even sheds tears when he hears something on the stage."

"In spite of all your cleverness," Tower of Jade said, "you don't appear to understand. Plays are intended to express sorrow, joy, separations and meetings. He saw something which touched his heart. He is not the first to weep when he sees a play. It is like thinking about a dead horse when we see a saddle."

"Oh, I don't believe a word of it," Golden Lotus said. "People who cry when they hear a tale or see a play are all pretending. If the actors can make people shed real tears, they must be very fine actors."

"Be quiet, ladies," the Moon Lady said. "Listen to the play."

"I can't think what makes this sister of ours so self-opinionated," Tower of Jade said to Aunt Wu.

The play went on until the fifth night-watch, and then the party began to break up. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took a large cup and, standing by the door, stopped his guests and pressed them to drink again. But, when he found he could keep them no longer, he allowed them to go. The servants cleared away, and Hsi-mên told the actors to leave their boxes because he wished them to perform another day when the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, were coming. The actors agreed, and, after being entertained with food and wine, went away. Li Ming and his three companions went home. It was nearly dawn and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the inner court to rest.

Chapter Sixty-four

SHU T'UNG RUNS AWAY

The jade is perished and the pearls are lost
Sadly he thinks of it.
In public he sheds tears, and in secret mourns.
Often he painted butterflies playing on the wall
And remembered the joy of the love birds
In the green curtains.
Now, only in dreams may he enjoy her.
She may not hope to emulate Fei Yin
Red lips and pearly teeth have joined the yellow dust.
Mournfully he longs to meet her
In the world to come.

IT was almost dawn when all the guests went home and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to rest. Tai An took a large pot of wine and several dishes and went to the shop to enjoy them with Clerk Fu and Ch'ên Ching-chi. Clerk Fu was getting old. He did not feel like sitting up any longer. He made his bed and lay down, saying to Tai An: "You and P'ing An had better have these things. I don't believe Brother-in-law Ch'ên is coming." Tai An went to fetch P'ing An. They encouraged one another to drink and finished everything off. Then they cleared away the dishes and plates and P'ing An went to his own place. Tai An shut up the shop and went and lay on Clerk Fu's bed, feet against feet.

"Well," Clerk Fu said, "the Sixth Lady is no more, but she has had a good send-off. Her coffin and the funeral are as fine as anyone could desire."

"Yes," said Tai An, "if she had lived longer she might have been accounted a very fortunate woman. Father has been to all this expense, but, after all, it was not his own money. She was very well off when she married him. I happen to be one of the few who know this. She had not only money, but gold, pearls, jade, embroideries and valuable ornaments of all sorts. They were the attraction. It wasn't the lady, but her money that our master wanted. But there wasn't a more agreeable lady in the whole household. She was unassuming and pleasant always. She had a smile and a kind word for

everybody she met, even the slaves. When she sent us out to buy anything, she would pick up a piece of silver and hand it to us. And if we said, as we sometimes did: 'Mother, won't you please weigh the silver?' she would smile and say: 'Take it away. Why should I weigh it? You wouldn't be working here if you didn't hope to make a little for yourselves now and again. So long as you bring me something good I shan't worry.' Everybody in the place borrowed money from her and nobody ever paid her back. She never troubled whether they did or not. The Great Lady and the Third Lady are generous too, but the Fifth Lady and the Second are as mean as mean can be. If it ever falls to them to run the household, we shall have a very bad time. The sort of thing they do is to give us short money when they send us out to buy things, nine fêns or something like that when the thing they want costs a ch'ien. I suppose we are expected to make up the difference ourselves."

"The Great Lady is not so bad as that," Clerk Fu said.

"She is not so bad as that, certainly," Tai An said, "but she loses her temper very easily. When she is in a good mood, one can talk to her and find her very agreeable, but when she is displeased, she scolds everybody without exception. The dead lady was far better than she is, for she never did harm to anyone and often spoke kindly for us to our master. If we got into scrapes, no matter how awkward, we used to go to her and she would speak to our master. He never refused anything she asked. But the Fifth Lady always has words upon her lips like 'Wait and see if I don't tell your father' or 'You shall have a beating'. Her maid Plum Blossom is another evil star. My word! They are a fine pair!"

"She has been here several years," Clerk Fu said.

"Yes, and you know what she was like when she came. She does not even treat her own mother decently. The poor old lady often goes away in tears. Now that the Sixth Lady is dead, I can see the Fifth Lady ruling the roost completely. Anyone who goes to clean up the garden will get a good cursing from her if he doesn't do it as she would have it."

Clerk Fu was soon fast asleep and snoring. Tai An had had some wine. He, too, was not long before he closed his eyes and was dead to the world. The sun was high in the heavens before they woke.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing often slept beside the coffin. Every morning, Flute of Jade came and took away the bed-clothes and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the inner court to dress. Then Shu T'ung, his hair undressed, would come to play and joke with the maid, and Flute of Jade would dally there a long time. But to-day, Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not sleep there but in the Moon Lady's room. Flute of Jade got up before the others and slipped out quietly. She went with Shu T'ung to the study in the garden and there they had a merry time together.

Golden Lotus also got up early that day. She went to the hall and saw that the light before the coffin had gone out. The tables and chairs were in disorder. Nobody was to be seen but Hua T'ung, who was busy sweeping.

"What are you doing here alone?" Golden Lotus said to him. "Where are the others?"

"They are not up yet," Hua T'ung told her.

"Put down your broom," Golden Lotus said, "and go and ask Brother-in-law for a roll of white silk. I want it for my mother. I want a girdle for her too. She is probably going away to-day."

"I think Brother-in-law is still in bed, but I will go and see," Hua T'ung said.

When he came back he said: "Brother-in-law says it isn't his business. Shu T'ung and Ts'ui Pên are responsible for the mourning. You must ask Shu T'ung."

"How do I know where he is?" Golden Lotus said. "Go and look for him."

Hua T'ung looked into the room beside the hall and said: "He was in here a few moments ago. Perhaps he has gone to the garden to dress his hair."

"Go on with your work and I'll go and look for him myself," Golden Lotus said. She went to the garden. When she came to the study she heard the sound of somebody laughing. She pushed the door open, Shu T'ung and Flute of Jade were enjoying a full measure of delight.

"Ah, you slaves!" Golden Lotus said, "excellent work you're doing there!"

Shu T'ung and Flute of Jade were scared. They plumped down on their knees and begged to be forgiven.

"You slave," Golden Lotus said to Shu T'ung, "go and

get me a roll of white silk and another of cloth. I am going to give them to my mother when she goes away."

Shu T'ung hastened to bring them for her and she went to her own room. Flute of Jade went with her, knelt down, and said: "Fifth Mother, please say nothing to my Father about this."

"Tell me," Golden Lotus said, "how often have you played this game with him? If you tell me the truth, I will say nothing."

Flute of Jade told her the whole story.

"I will forgive you," Golden Lotus said, "on condition that you promise me three things."

"If you will only forgive me, I will do anything you wish," Flute of Jade said.

"First: whatever happens in your mistress's room, whether important or unimportant, you must tell me all about it. If I hear it from anybody else, and you have not told me, I will never forgive you. Secondly: you must get anything I want. Thirdly: I wish to know how it is that your mistress, who was never with child before, is now going to have a baby."

"The truth is," Flute of Jade told her, "that my mother took some medicine made out of an after-birth which Nun Hsüeh brought for her."

Golden Lotus did not forget this, but she did not say anything to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

When Shu T'ung saw that Golden Lotus took Flute of Jade away with her, smiling in a manner that boded ill, he decided that the matter was going to have unpleasant consequences. He went to the study, opened the cupboard, and took a number of handkerchiefs, kerchiefs and pins, together with some of the presents that had come from relatives. He had about ten taels of silver of his own and he went to the shop and got another twenty by deceiving Clerk Fu, telling him that he had to buy some silk. He went outside the city, hired a mule for a long journey, and went to the river. There he took boat and went to Su-chou, his native place.

This day Cassia, Silver Maid, and Moonbeam went away. The two eunuchs, Hsüeh and Liu, sent food and paper offerings as offerings for the dead, and a tael of silver. They

also sent two story-tellers to discourse upon a religious theme, and announced that they would come in person to visit Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên wished to send some silk to the eunuchs and looked about for Shu T'ung who kept the keys. He could not find the boy. Clerk Fu told him: "This morning he asked me for twenty taels and said you had given him orders to buy some silk. He may have gone outside the city for it."

"I never gave him any such orders," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "How dared he ask you for the money?" He sent people to look for the boy in all the silk-shops, but in vain.

"I always believed there was something crooked about that slave," the Moon Lady said to Hsi-mên. "He has got into a scrape of some sort, stolen the money and made off. Go and look round your study. Then we shall know if he has taken anything else."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the study. The key was hanging on the wall. Handkerchiefs, presents, and pins had disappeared from the great cupboard. He was very angry and gave orders to the police to arrest the boy wherever they found him. But they never found him.

About noon, Eunuch Hsüeh came in his sedan-chair. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had invited Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên to meet him. The eunuch came to the coffin and made reverence. "I deeply sympathise with you," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "What was the cause of your lady's death?"

"She suffered, unfortunately, from an issue of blood," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "It is good of you to come."

"I had nothing worthy to offer," Hsüeh said, "and such things as I have sent are merely to indicate something of what is in my mind." He looked at the portrait that hung before the coffin. "How beautiful she was. And how sad that, when she was still so young and seemed to have such a happy life before her, she should have died."

"Such are the changes and chances of life," said Master Wên, who was standing beside them. "Such is the inevitability of fate. Some are poor, others rich. Some live long; others only for a short while. Yet all are governed by their destiny. Even the sages must submit to fate."

Eunuch Hsüeh turned and looked at the speaker. He

noticed that Master Wên was wearing academic robes and said: "Brother, may I ask to which academy you belong?"

Master Wên bowed low. "I am a man of very small learning," he said, "and my name is inscribed only in the records of the academy of our prefecture."

Hsüeh asked if he might look at the coffin. Hsi-mên bade a servant draw back the curtains and the eunuch examined the coffin closely. "What a magnificent coffin!" he said. "How much did it cost?"

"I bought it from a relative," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Venerable Sir," Ying Po-chüeh said, "guess how much it cost, and tell us where it came from and what the wood is called."

Hsüeh again examined it very carefully. "I should say it came from Chien-ch'ang or, if not, from Chên-yüan," he said.

"If it had come from Chên-yüan," Po-chüeh said, "it would not be so fine."

"I believe the best elm comes from Yang-hsüan," the eunuch said.

"The Yang-hsüan elm is short and thin. It is not to be compared with this. This is made of much finer wood called Peach Flower Cavern. The tree grows in Wu-ling in Hu-kuang. Long, long ago an old fisherman came to that cavern and saw some maidens of the Ch'in dynasty who had gone there to escape the soldiery. It is a place to which travellers seldom go. The boards of which this coffin is made were seven feet long, four inches thick, and two feet five inches broad. His Lordship paid three hundred and seventy taels for them, although he is a kinsman of the owner. Ah, Venerable Sir, you should have seen it before it was made up. Such fragrance! Such exquisite markings on both sides of the wood!"

"Fate was generous in allowing this lady to enjoy so wonderful a coffin," the eunuch said. "We court chamberlains can hardly hope for such a funeral when our time comes."

"It is very kind of you to say so," Uncle Wu said, "but, Sir, you are in the closest relations with the Imperial Court, and we, who are merely officers of the external administration, can in no way approach you. You, Sir, were but lately basking in the favour of the Son of Heaven. To us, you represent His Majesty's precious words. His Excellency T'ung has been

given the title of Duke, and those who follow after him will wear ceremonial dress. There is, I am sure, a glorious future before you."

"May I ask your name?" the eunuch said, "you speak with great discretion."

"This is Wu, my wife's brother," Hsi-mên said. "He is a captain in our district."

"Is he the dead lady's brother?" Hsüeh asked.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing explained that Uncle Wu was his first wife's eldest brother.

"You must please excuse me, worthy Sir," Eunuch Hsüeh said to Uncle Wu, bowing. Hsi-mên Ch'ing then took them all to the temporary hall. He offered a chair to the eunuch and the servants brought tea.

"I wonder why Liu has not come yet," Hsüeh said. "I must send one of my servants for him." One of the eunuch's servants knelt down.

"I did go to bring His Worship," he said, "and his sedan-chair was waiting for him. I am sure he will be here soon." Hsüeh asked if the two story-tellers had come. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him that they had. They were summoned, and came to kotow. Hsüeh asked them if they had had anything to eat, and, when they told him that they had, bade them do what they had been sent to do with all due care, promising them a good reward.

"Venerable Sir," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I have engaged some actors. Perhaps you would like to hear them."

"Where are they from?" the eunuch asked.

"They are a company from Hai-yen," Hsi-mên told him.

"These barbarous dialects sound so impossible," Hsüeh said, "I can't understand a word they say. Poor devils of students, who put their noses to the grindstone for three years, and then wander all over the place for another nine, carrying a guitar, a sword, and a box of books, then come to the capital for the examination, and, when they have got a job, have to leave their wife and children behind,—they are the people to enjoy actors of this sort. I'm just a single old chamberlain. Why should I bother about them?"

Master Wên smiled. "Venerable Sir," he said, "I am afraid I cannot agree with you. When in Ch'i, do as the Ch'i people

do. Even though you occupy such an exalted position, there is a possibility that these actors may amuse you."

Hsüeh laughed and clapped his hands. "Ah," he said, "I had forgotten Master Wên. Of course he takes the part of the officers who serve away from the court."

"Scholars and officers stand or fall together," Master Wên said. "If you cut down a branch you injure a hundred forests. When anything happens to the hare, the fox grieves. If you disapprove of one, you disapprove of all."

"Not at all," Hsüeh said. "In the same place you find both fools and wise men."

At that moment a servant came and told them that Liu had come. Uncle Wu went out to welcome him. After making a reverence before the coffin, he greeted the others.

"What has made you so late?" Hsüeh asked.

"Hsü came to call on me. I could not get away without sitting down with him for a while."

They sat down and the servants brought tea. Liu asked his attendants if the food to be offered to the dead was ready. The servant told him that everything was arranged. "Let us go and burn some paper offerings," Liu said.

"Venerable Sir," Hsi-mên said, "do not disturb yourself to such an extent. You have already made reverence to her."

"I came for that purpose," Liu said. "I must offer something to her with my own hands."

A servant brought incense. The two eunuchs together offered it and three cups of wine to the Lady of the Vase. They made reverence again to the dead lady. Then Hsi-mên prayed them to stand up. They made only two reverences and Hsi-mên Ch'ing made reverence to them in return. Then they went back to the arbour. A table was set.

When the two eunuchs had taken their places, Master Wên, Uncle Wu and Ying Po-chüeh sat down, Hsi-mên Ch'ing sat in the seat of the host. The music began and the actors brought out their list of plays. The two eunuchs went through the list and bade them play the Story of the White Rabbit. But before the play had proceeded very far, the two eunuchs were tired of it. They sent for the two story-tellers, who played and told the story of how the snow stopped Han Wên-kung in Lan-kuan.

Eunuch Hsüeh began to talk to his colleague. "Brother Liu," he said, "I don't suppose you have heard, but the other day, the tenth day of the eighth month, there was a terrible rainstorm, and the roof-figures at the palace were struck by lightning. A number of people at the court died of fright. Even His Majesty was alarmed. He admonished all the officials to take the greatest care in the performance of their duties, ordered the *Ching Ling Shu* to be read every day in Shang Ch'ing Palace, and forbade the killing of animals for sacrificial purposes for ten days. For the same space of time the courts were not permitted to give sentence and no reports might be made to the Emperor.

"Then an ambassador came from the people of Chin and demanded the surrender of three of our towns. The old villain Ts'ai Ching suggested that this should be agreed to. As for the troops which had been under T'ung's command, the Censor T'an Chi, Huang An and others were to take them over. T'ung was to withdraw from the three districts in question, but he refused to come back and the case has been referred to a council of ministers.

"The other day was the Winter Festival, and his Majesty went to the Temple of His Ancestors to offer sacrifice. There is a certain doctor in the Department of Imperial Ceremonies called Fang Chên, and, in the morning, when he went to inspect the temple, he discovered blood issuing from the courses between the bricks. At the north-eastern corner, the floor had given way. He told the Emperor about this and one of the censors told His Majesty that this was a sign that T'ung had assumed a power beyond his due, there being no justification for the appointment of a eunuch as a duke. After this, the Emperor at once sent an envoy with his Golden Decree summoning T'ung to return."

"Well," Liu said, "you and I do our duty here. What happens at the Court is no concern of ours. Let us enjoy whatever the day brings forth. Even if the sky seems about to fall, still, as the proverb says, there are four giants to hold it up. It looks to me as if this Empire of Sung would be ruined by busybody ministers. Let us drink."

He told the story-tellers to sing the story of Li Po and his fondness for wine. This they did. About sunset, the two

eunuchs called for their sedan-chairs. Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not persuade them to stay longer and went with them to the gate. When he returned he gave orders for the candles to be lighted and sat down again with Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên. He sent boys to bring Clerk Fu, Clerk Kan, Han Tao-kuo, Pên IV, Ts'ui Pên and Ch'ên Ching-chi. Then he bade the actors perform the play of the Jade Ring which they had played the day before.

"The eunuchs do not understand these southern plays," he said to Ying Po-chüeh. "If I had realised that I would not have asked them to stay."

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh said, "they did not appreciate the compliment you were paying them. Eunuchs are very ignorant. They like such things as the story of Lan-kuan, simple tales, folk songs and all that sort of thing, but the higher forms of art, compositions of a really great order, are completely beyond them."

The music began and the actors played that part of the Jade Ring which had not been finished the day before. Hsi-mên Ch'ing called for good wine to be brought.

Ying Po-chüeh, sitting at Hsi-mên's table, asked if the three singing-girls were still there. "Why don't you send for them and make them serve the wine?" he said. But Hsi-mên said: "You must be dreaming. They have been gone a long time."

"Then they only stayed a day or two," Po-chüeh said.

"Silver Maid was here longest," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him.

It was the third night-watch before the party broke up. The play was finished. Hsi-mên asked Uncle Wu to come early the following day to welcome the guests for him. Then he gave the actors four taels of silver and dismissed them.

The next day, Major Chou, General Ching, Captain Chang of the militia, and Magistrate Hsia came with other officers to make their offering to the dead lady. They made a reverence before the coffin and someone was appointed to read their panegyric. Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered them refreshment. Li Ming and the other three young actors were in attendance. It was about noon when the offerings were brought. Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên stood at the gate to welcome the officers. They came in and changed their clothes in the great hall. Then the offerings of food were set out, and

they came together to make reverence before the coffin. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi were there to return their salutation. The Master of Ceremonies conducted the appropriate ceremonies and, when the triple offering had been made, knelt down to read the panegyric. When it was done, Hsi-mên Ch'ing thanked his visitors, and the officers were taken to the temporary hall. They took off their robes and had tea. Tables were set and they sat down to enjoy themselves. The young actors played and sang to them. About sunset they went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing would have liked Uncle Wu and the others to stay, but Uncle Wu said: "It seems to me that we are all rather tired, especially you, and we must have a rest." He went away with the rest.

THE BURIAL OF THE LADY OF THE VASE

THE twenty-eighth day of the tenth month was the fourteenth day after the death of the Lady of the Vase. This was the second week's mind, and Abbot Wu with sixteen monks from the Taoist Temple of the Jade King came to make sacrifice. They brought banners and set up an altar in the house. A letter came from Secretary An. Hsi-mên Ch'ing entertained the messenger and dismissed him.

Abbot Wu brought a table of food and a roll of silk as his personal offering. The monks sang dirges and the abbot solemnly made reverence before the coffin. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi returned the reverence.

"Teacher," Hsi-mên said, "you should not have done so much. We really do not know how we can accept this offering."

"I am ashamed of my unworthiness to offer sacrifice for your lady," Abbot Wu said. "These little things are no more than a trifling indication of my regard for her." Hsi-mên Ch'ing accepted the offerings and the men who had brought the boxes were sent away. The monks busied themselves most diligently with their ceremonies. They sought the dead lady in the nine dungeons of Hell; they summoned her spirit; they prayed for her relief.

The next day, the first to arrive was Uncle Han, who lived outside the city gates. With him came Tower of Jade's brother, Mêng Jui, who had returned from his business abroad. Hearing that there was a bereavement in Hsi-mên Ch'ing's household, he came with Uncle Han, brought an offering of his own, and asked to be permitted to wear mourning. After paying his respects to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, he went to see his sister. Later, Hsi-mên Ch'ing entertained him.

About noon, a number of civil officers came. There were Li Kung-chi, the District Magistrate; Ch'ien Ssü-ch'êng, the Assistant Magistrate; Jên Liang-kuei, the Deputy-Assistant Magistrate; and the Gaol Warden, Hsia Kung-chi. The District Magistrate of Yang-ku, Ti Ssü-hsiu, came with them. The five gentlemen were all wearing mourning and brought with them presents and paper offerings. Hsi-mên

Ch'ing, with Uncle Wu and Scholar Wên, entertained them, and three young actors sang for them.

While they were drinking, Hsi-mên Ch'ing was told that his Excellency, Huang, the Controller of the Brickfields, had come to offer his condolences. He hastily put on his mourning robes again and went to the coffin. Master Wên went out to the gate to welcome his Excellency. Servants came bringing incense, paper offerings, and silk, and they walked in procession to the coffin. Huang burned incense and made a reverence to the dead. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi returned the reverence.

"I did not know that your lady was dead," Huang said, "or I should have been here sooner. I am sorry to be so late."

"It is a long time since I have been to see your Excellency," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "and now you come to me with such gifts. I don't know how to thank you." He took Huang to the hall. There Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Master Wên sat down with him, and the servants brought tea.

"Sung Sung-yüan sends his love to you," Huang said. "He has heard of your lady's death and would have liked to come and see you, but he is very busy at the moment and has had to go to Chi-chou. You may not have heard that His Majesty is going to set up the Kên Yo mountain. He has appointed Grand Marshal Chu Mien to proceed south of the river to collect the marbles. The boats have been coming down one after another, and the first of them has now reached the Huai and will come down the river into Shan-tung. The marble is beautifully marked and in pieces about twenty feet long and several feet wide. Each piece is covered in yellow wrappings, and the boats, which are very many, all carry yellow flags. The river is shallow just now and people have been brought together from all around to tow the boats. It has been a most unpleasant time for officials and people alike, and the people, especially, are finding life very hard. Our friend Sung has to see to everything himself and direct all the underlings in his district. There are so many orders and instructions, that they would make a mountain. Sung is busy all day and all night, and never has a moment to himself.

"Now, Grand Marshal Huang is coming from the Capital, and friend Sung, with all his staff, is going to receive him. He

has asked me to say that, as he has no other friend here to whom he is able to appeal, he hopes you will entertain the Grand Marshal."

He bade his servants summon the messengers whom Sung had sent. Two officials in black robes came and knelt down. They brought presents of gold silk, incense, candles and paper. "These are the things Sung has sent on his own account. The other parcels contain the presents from his staff. From the Provincial Treasurer and the Provincial Judge, twelve; and from the officers of the Prefecture, eight. In all there are twenty-two presents, a hundred and six taels."

He offered the gifts to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and again asked if he would entertain the Grand Marshal.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing hesitated. "I am in mourning, and I do not know what I ought to do. When is His Grace coming?"

"There is plenty of time," Huang said, "he won't be here for another six weeks. He has not left the Capital yet."

"My wife is to be buried on the twelfth day of the tenth month," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Since you and his Lordship are good enough to give me such a proof of your confidence, I will do what you wish. But I cannot accept these presents. Say what you would have me do and I will make the necessary preparations."

"Nothing of the sort," Huang said. "Sung asked me to approach you on the matter and these presents have been sent by all the officers of the province. They are not from Sung alone. You can't possibly refuse them. If you insist, I shall take them back and we will not ask you to do anything for us."

"In that case," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I have no option in the matter." He told Tai An and Wang Ching to remove the presents. Then he asked what preparations it would be necessary to make.

"For his Grace," said Huang, "a long state table. For Sung, the Provincial Treasurer and the Provincial Judge, a table on the floor level, and, for the lower officers, tables of the common sort. We ourselves will provide for the servants and musicians. You need not trouble about them."

Tea was brought a second time and Huang stood up to take leave. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him to stay, but the Controller said: "I am on my way to see Shang Liu-t'ang. He used

to hold the post I have now, and afterwards he was made a judge at Ch'êng-tu. His son, Liang-ch'üan, passed the examination when I did."

"I did not know you were a friend of Liang-ch'üan," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "He is a good friend of mine too."

Huang made ready to go. "Please give my respects to his Excellency Sung," Hsi-mên said, "and tell him I await his pleasure."

"When the time comes he will send word," Huang said. "Do not be too extravagant in your preparations."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing escorted Huang to the gate. He mounted his horse and rode away.

When the magistrate and the officers heard that Huang had come with officials from the provincial government, they were tremendously alarmed, and ran away to hide in the small harbour near the artificial mound. They told their servants to take their horses and sedan-chairs away. When Hsi-mên Ch'ing rejoined them, he told them that Sung had asked him to entertain Grand Marshal Huang the following month. With one voice they made complaint: "Our district is poor enough already. If the Grand Marshal comes, we shall have to provide all kinds of things, banquets, materials and servants, and we shall have to extract the money from the people. What more dreadful calamity could have overtaken us? We only hope you will speak to his Excellency on our behalf, for we are all friends of yours." They went away.

The days passed until it was the twenty-first day after the death of the Lady of the Vase. The abbot Tao Chien of the Temple of Eternal Felicity outside the gates came with sixteen monks to perform the appropriate rites. They wore embroidered vestments and large hats, and, with their drums and great gongs, performed a very imposing ceremony.

On the twenty-eighth day the priests of Pao Ch'ing Temple came to sing the Buddhist liturgy for the dead. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was not at home. He had gone to the grave with Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, to watch the pit being dug. He came back in the afternoon, and, in the evening, all the monks departed. The next day, he sent wine, food, and other things to the grave, and instructed his servants to put up a temporary

building, the size of three rooms, near the site of the grave. The neighbours were entertained and, afterwards, everybody was given a present.

On the eleventh day, very early, a troop of singing-boys came with their gongs and instruments to perform some farewell plays before the coffin. They played 'The Five Demons playing pranks on P'an Kuan'; 'Chang T'ien-shih being led astray by Devils'; 'Chung K'uei and the Little Ghosts'; 'Lao-tzū passing over Han Kuan'; 'The Six Thieves deceiving Amida'; 'Plums in the Snow'; 'Chuang-tzū dreaming of the Butterflies'; 'The Heavenly Prince sending down Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind'; and many another. The ladies watched the plays from the other side of the screen. When they were over, all the relatives came and burned paper offerings before the coffin. They made loud lamentation.

The next day was the funeral. At a very early hour the obituary banner was brought out together with a host of other banners and objects made of paper. Musicians and Buddhist and Taoist clergy came. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had arranged with Major Chou for fifty soldiers, all fully equipped with arms and horses. Ten of them were on duty at the house; the other forty marched on either side of the coffin. Another twenty men from his own department marched in front and attended to the paper objects. Still another twenty had gone before to the funeral-ground to guard the gate and receive the offerings that might be sent there.

Officers, scholars, relatives, friends and neighbours assembled for the funeral. There was a great din of horses and carriages arriving and the street was full of people. Many more than a hundred sedan-chairs brought ladies. Even the smaller sedan-chairs of the singing-girls might have been counted in scores.

Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, selected the moment for the procession to start.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave directions for Beauty of the Snow to stay at home with the two nuns.

P'ing An and two soldiers stood at the gate.

Ch'ên Ching-chi, on his knees before the coffin, broke a cup into many pieces. Then sixty-four undertakers lifted the coffin upon their shoulders, their directors standing upon a

raised platform and signalling instructions by striking a wooden gong. The priests of the Temple of Eternal Felicity chanted a dirge and the procession started down the main street and turned to the South. The masses of people on either side of the street seemed like a sea of men, a human mountain. The weather was fine and it was a magnificently imposing funeral.

Banners bearing characters of gold; banners with characters
of silver

Following close behind the coffin.

Parasols of white silk and parasols of green silk

Carried by those who walk before it.

Banners for worthiness fluttering in the breeze.

Cries and groans of lamentation all the way.

Soldiers marching to clear the road

Brandish staves of olive wood.

Acrobats coming to meet the god, trying to display their skill

Tumble and twist to left and right

With bodies lithe as falcons

Clambering like monkeys over their horses

Standing on their heads

Turning somersaults

Passing coins through their bellies

And standing on one leg like golden cockerels.

The people applaud

Each trying to praise more loudly than his neighbour.

Shoulder to shoulder and back to back

Wise and foolish undistinguishable

Nobles and commonalty, all are there to see.

Chang V, the big blockhead

Puffing and blowing.

Li IV, the dwarf

On his toes all the time.

White-haired old gentlemen

Propping their beards on their sticks.

Dark-haired beauties

With babes in their arms

All come to look at the funeral procession.

There were more than ten sedan-chairs for the Moon Lady, Picture of Grace and the other ladies. They followed the coffin one behind the other. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, wearing a hempen hat and mourning dress, walked with the others immediately after

it. Ch'ên Ching-chi placed his hand upon the coffin and so they came to the beginning of East Street. There Hsi-mên Ch'ing, in accordance with the Rites, called upon Abbot Wu of the Temple of the Jade King to set up the portrait. The Abbot wore a gown embroidered with a scarlet stork, a hat of the Nine Thunders, and a pair of orange-coloured shoes. In his hand was an ivory tablet. He rode in a sedan-chair carried by four men. He advanced towards the coffin, bearing the large portrait of the Lady of the Vase. Ch'ên Ching-chi knelt down and the procession halted. Then, while all listened attentively, the Abbot began to read.

"This is the dead lady of Hsi-mên, officer of the Royal Guard. She was born at noon on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year *Hsin Wei*, and departed this life, very early in the morning of the seventeenth day of the ninth month of the seventh year of the reign *Chêng Ho*. She lived for twenty-seven years. The glorious dead was an excellent lady of high degree, most beautiful of wives. Nature endowed her with a loveliness like that of flowers and the moon. Her disposition was as fragrant as the orchid. In temper and behaviour, she was gentle and sweet; in character, agreeable and harmonious. And as she was wise and gentle when in her own family, so, after her marriage, she lived most perfectly with her husband. A child she bore, like the jade of Lan-t'ien, but he drooped as the blossom of an orchid. We hoped that a hundred years of happy life might be before her, but, alas, she lived but twenty-seven. As the bright moon always fades, so the treasures of this world easily elude us. She, this excellent lady, died suddenly, for whether we die young or live to old age is for the Fates to decide.

"Now we bear her coffin through the streets, and mourning banners wave in the breeze. Her worthy husband laments before her bier, and her household, here in the street, are broken-hearted. So deep is their affection that they can never forget her. But lest, being dead, the remembrance of her appearance should be dimmed, we, who unworthily assume this hat and these ornaments of the Taoist faith, unworthily because we failed to restore her to health, can only, with all due reverence, follow the traditions of our ancestors and set forth her portrait for exhibition.

"We cannot bring back the butterfly of Chuang-tzŭ's dream, but we hope that in Paradise she may partake of sweet dew and precious refreshment. When she comes face to face with the True God, she will be adorned with a hundred jewels and her pure spirit will not long remain in Hades. Then will her mind forget all things, for all things, in very truth, are but illusion.

"So, as her body is buried, may her spirit become a pure breeze. This true spirit will go away and return no more, and she will enter into eternal life. Hearken now, while we bid her a last farewell. We know not whither her spirit goeth, but her portrait will remain for people of future generations to gaze upon."

The sedan-chair, with the Abbot sitting upright within it, slowly withdrew. The music played and there was a great lamentation. The funeral procession moved forward. When it came to the East Gate, the relatives and Hsi-mên Ch'ing mounted horses, but Ch'ên Ching-chi continued on foot behind the coffin all the way to the grave. Captain Chang and two hundred soldiers, and the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, were at the burying-place, stationed on the hillock. There they received the coffin with music. Paper offerings were burnt and the smoke reached the skies. When the body was brought to the hill, the undertakers set it down while Hsü, the Master of the Yin Yang, went with them to examine the grave with a compass. When everything was ready, sacrifice was made to the god of the place; the coffin was lowered into the grave, and earth cast upon it.

Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing changed his clothes, and, taking two rolls of silk to Major Chou, asked him to put the final dot upon the tablet. After this, the officials of Hsi-mên's office, and his relatives and friends, offered wine to him. The music thundered and fireworks blazed everywhere. It was a magnificent scene.

After taking some refreshment, they prepared for the return journey. The Moon Lady sat in the Spirit's sedan-chair, with the tablet and the banner. Ch'ên Ching-chi went back with the Spirit's bed, the fourteen Taoist novices accompanying him, playing music all the way. Both uncles Wu, Master Ch'iao, uncles Hua, Shên and Mêng, Ying Po-chüeh and Hsieh

Hsi-ta, Master Wên and the clerks, came back with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. The ladies' chairs followed. When they reached the gate, a fire was lighted. Then they went in, and set up the tablet in the room of the Lady of the Vase. Master Hsü performed various ceremonies, purified the whole house, and set yellow charms upon all the doors to keep away evil spirits. He was given a roll of silk and five taels of silver, and went away. The other guests went too. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took twenty strings of small money, five for the policemen, five for the soldiers of his own department, and ten for those of Major Chou. He sent a servant with his card to thank Major Chou, Captain Chang and Magistrate Hsia. He urged Master Ch'iao and the others to remain, but they declined and went away.

Lai Pao came. "The men who set up the temporary buildings await your orders," he said; "they propose to remove everything to-morrow."

"I do not wish them taken down yet," Hsi-mên said. "Tell the men to come after I have entertained Censor Sung."

In the inner court, Mistress Hua and Mistress Ch'iao waited to see the tablet set up, then they made a last lamentation and went away.

That evening, Hsi-mên Ch'ing, still thinking of the Lady of the Vase, went to her room. The tablet was placed in the position of honour, facing her portrait. The smaller portrait was next to the tablet. There was a small silver bed and silver coverlets in a shrine, complete in every way with ornaments, and, beneath it, a pair of tiny shoes. On a table were incense, flowers, candles, plates, bowls and all kinds of things offered to the dead. Hsi-mên Ch'ing cried again. He bade Welcome Spring make a bed for him opposite the tablet. In the middle of the night he watched the lonely lamp and the moon shining through the window. He tossed about on his bed and sighed. All the time, he thought of the beauty he had lost.

Mournfully he sighed before her shuttered window
Lonely and broken-hearted, like the phoenix
That has lost his mate.
The orchids are withered, and the rain of autumn falls
The maple leaves drop into the river
In the frosty night.

Their longing to be together was in vain
In this life he will never more behold her.
If the dead know what passes in the world
Then there must be two heartbroken lovers
One still on earth, the other in the underworld.

When day came, Hsi-mên Ch'ing watched the maids offer food and tea to their dead mistress, and he took his own meals there. When he took up his chop-sticks, he looked towards the tablet and invited his dead lady to eat with him. Seeing this, the maids and the nurse shed tears. When he was alone, Heart's Delight used to come and give him tea and things to eat. She would find means to touch him, and an excuse for saying something or other, and soon they were on very good terms with one another.

One day, Hsi-mên Ch'ing invited a number of ladies and gentlemen to a service at the grave, and, when he came back, he was drunk. Welcome Spring helped him to bed. In the middle of the night he wished for some tea, but Welcome Spring was not there and Heart's Delight brought it for him. She noticed that his bedclothes had almost fallen on the floor, so, when she had given him the teacup, she gathered them up for him. This touched him; he put his arms round her neck and kissed her. Then he slipped his tongue between her lips. She let it pass, but did not speak. Hsi-mên told her to undress, and they got into bed together and played with great delight.

"Now my mistress is dead," Heart's Delight said, "I will stay here and serve you, if you love me."

"If you serve me well," said Hsi-mên Ch'ing, "you need not worry."

After this, the woman did all she could to give him satisfaction, and was ready to do everything he wished. This pleased him.

The next day she got up and brought his shoes and socks, made the bed, and would not allow Welcome Spring to do anything for him. Hsi-mên took four pins which had belonged to the Lady of the Vase and gave them to her. She kotowed and thanked him. Welcome Spring knew this and joined forces with her. Heart's Delight, realising that her position was now secure, and that she no longer needed help from anyone else,

became quite different in manner. Every day she dressed beautifully and mingled with the other maids. She talked and joked so much that Golden Lotus remarked it.

One morning, Hsi-mên Ch'ing was sitting with Ying Po-chüeh, when one of the servants told him that a man had come from Sung the Censor. He had brought a set of gold and silver wine-cups, a pair of gold wine-pots, two pairs of gold goblets, ten pairs of small silver cups, two pairs of silver jars, four pairs of large silver cups, two rolls of scarlet silk, two rolls of gold silk, ten jars of wine, and two sheep. He said that the Grand Marshal's boat had now arrived at Tung-ch'ang, and brought a message asking Hsi-mên Ch'ing to prepare for his entertainment on the eighteenth. Hsi-mên accepted all these things, and gave the man a tael of silver and his card. He ordered Pên IV and Lai Hsing to buy whatever might be necessary.

"Ever since my sixth wife's illness," Hsi-mên said to Ying Po-chüeh, "I have never had a moment to myself. Now the funeral is over, there comes this business, and I shall be more occupied than ever."

"You must not complain, Brother," Po-chüeh said, "it is not of your seeking. They came to you. You will certainly have to spend a little money, but the presence of the high officers of the province will make your house glorious."

"That is not what is troubling me," Hsi-mên said, "but I expected they would come some time after the twentieth. If they come on the eighteenth things will have to be done in a hurry. It will be the thirty-fifth day after her death, too. I have made arrangements for a service with Abbot Wu and I cannot alter the date. Even if I could alter it, I couldn't manage with these two things coming on the same day."

"I don't see any difficulty about it," Po-chüeh said. "My sister-in-law died on the seventeenth day of the ninth month, and the fifth week's mind will be on the twenty-first. You have this reception on the eighteenth and the service on the twentieth. That does not seem too late to me."

"Very well," Hsi-mên said, "I will send a boy to explain matters to the Abbot."

"There is another matter," Po-chüeh said. "His Holiness, Huang, who has been deputed by his Majesty to go to T'ai-

an to offer incense, and also to accomplish the solemn sacrifice to Heaven that lasts for seven days and seven nights, is staying at present at our temple here. Before he goes away, you might get Abbot Wu to invite His Holiness to come and hold a service here. We should be only too glad to have a cleric of such great renown."

"Yes," said Hsi-mên, "everybody says that Huang is a real saint. I would ask him to come, but Abbot Wu, you know, sent me a number of presents the other day; he displayed the portrait of my dead wife, and his priests came to the funeral. There was nothing I could do in return for all these attentions except to ask him to come and perform the sacrifice. If I now invite Huang, I don't know how I can make things right with Wu."

"Ask Wu to arrange the whole affair," Ying Po-chüeh said, "and suggest that he invites Huang for the final ceremony only. If you spend a few more taels there need be no difficulty. And, after all, you are spending money for your wife and not for anybody else."

So Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'ên Ching-chi to write a letter to the Abbot, requesting him to invite Huang, and saying that the day for the service would be the twentieth. Twenty-four monks would be wanted and the service should last for a day and a night. Five taels more were sent with the letter, which Tai An was ordered to deliver on horseback immediately. Ying Po-chüeh went away and Hsi-mên Ch'ing joined the Moon Lady in the inner court.

The Moon Lady told him that Pên IV's wife had brought her daughter Evening Star to present her on the occasion of her engagement. They had brought two boxes of presents with them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked to whom the girl was engaged.

Mistress Pên IV and her daughter, who was wearing a red silken gown, a yellow skirt, and many ornaments upon her hair, came and kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. The Moon Lady stood beside them. "I hear," she said, "that Magistrate Hsia has made choice of this young lady. The arrangement was yesterday and the wedding is to be upon the twenty-fourth. He gave only thirty taels of silver for her. She is good to look upon and no one would think she was only fifteen. She seems

more like sixteen or seventeen. She has grown so much in the short time since I saw her last."

"He told me the other day," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "that he was thinking of securing two young ladies and having them taught music, but I never thought of asking who they were."

The Moon Lady entertained Mistress Pên IV and her daughter, and Picture of Grace, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus, Beauty of the Snow and Orchid came and joined them. When Mistress Pên went away, the Moon Lady gave her a complete outfit of heavy silk and a tael of silver. Picture of Grace and the other ladies all gave her something, flowers, ornaments, kerchiefs, powder, or something of the sort.

In the evening, Tai An returned and said that Abbot Wu had accepted the silver. "His Holiness Huang," he said, "is still here and will remain until after the twentieth. They will come on the morning of the nineteenth and prepare the altar and the dais."

The next day, Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave instructions to the cooks, insisting that everything should be of the very best. At the great gate he set up a seven-storied pagoda, and, before the great hall, one of five stories.

On the seventeenth, there came two officers from Sung to see what preparations had been made. At the upper part of the hall they saw a peacock screen. The floor was covered with coloured rugs. The chair cushions and tablecloths were all embroidered. The food which had been prepared for the Grand Marshal was the finest imaginable and the delicacies were delightful to eat as well as to look at. Two smaller tables were set for the two provincial officers, and there were a few other tables for provincial officers of rank. Outside the hall, in the temporary building that had been put up, were a number of tables for five courses of food and five of dessert for the officials of the eight districts. When the officers had finished their inspection, Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave them tea, and they went back to report to their superiors.

The next day the provincial dignitaries came with a host of officers to await the arrival of the Grand Marshal's boat. They had with them a yellow banner with the words 'IMPERIAL COMMISSIONER', and before them was carried the

imperial decree. The officers, guards and soldiers of every kind were in full dress, marching behind their banners. The procession stretched for miles.

Then came Grand Marshal Huang. He wore a robe with the scarlet dragon embroidered upon it and rode in a sedan-chair carried by eight men. Another eight men marched beside it. This chair had a silver top and the canopy above it was tea-coloured. A host of officers and attendants followed, all mounted upon splendid horses. The procession was as fine as a bouquet of ten thousand flowers. They marched along to the strains of martial music. The road was strewn with yellow sand. As the procession advanced there was such a silence that even the dogs did not bark or the cocks crow. Not a soul dared step forward.

They passed through Tung-p'ing Fu and arrived at Ch'ing Ho. The officials of the district knelt on either side of the road, till the Grand Marshal's guard called out: "Stand up, stand up!" Messenger after messenger was despatched to Hsi-mên's house.

At last they arrived, and the noise of the music was great enough to reach the skies. Beside the gate, in double ranks on either side, stood officers robed in black. Hsi-mên Ch'ing himself, also in black robes and hat, bowed low to the dust. The soldiers marched past and the Grand Marshal's chair appeared. The Grand Marshal came in, followed by a crowd of people of high and low degree. He entered the great hall and the music played again, stringed and wind instruments together.

First, the Governor of Shan-tung, Hou Mêng, and the Censor, Sung Ch'iao-nien, came to greet the Grand Marshal, and he returned their salutations. Then the Provincial Treasurer of Shan-tung, Kung Ch'i; State Counsellor Ho Ch'i-kao; Provincial Treasurer Ch'ên Ssü-chên; State Counsellor Li K'an-t'ing; Counsellor Fêng T'ing-ku; Counsellor Wang Po-yen and a number of other provincial officers came to salute his Excellency, and he received them with pleasant affability. They were followed by the Prefects of the eight Prefectures. These made reverence from the courtyard, and the Grand Marshal bowed low to them in return. The captains and military officers came then, but the Grand Marshal sat

still and took no notice of them. All the officers went back to remain in waiting outside.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Hsia came to offer tea to the Grand Marshal. The two officers of highest rank present, Hou and Sung, themselves handed the cup to His Grace. The music played. Then they offered a golden flower, and wine in a goblet of jade. The Grand Marshal moved towards his table and, when he had seated himself, the Governor, the Censor and the other officers sat down in due order. Hsi-mên Ch'ing sat down too. The manager of the company of actors brought his repertory and the dance began. Both dancing and music were extremely well performed. They played the first act of 'P'ei Chin-kung returns the Girdle'. When this was over, cooks brought meat, venison and pork, with all manner of sauces and dressings, soup, a hundred kinds of the richest and rarest of viands, with rice and *shao mai*. Then four actors, with guitar, flute, lute and cithern, sang songs unaccompanied by dancing. While two courses of soup were being served, the music played three times. Sung appointed two officers to entertain the Grand Marshal's attendants in the temporary rooms, while Hsi-mên Ch'ing had arranged for the entertainment of the military officers in the outer court.

The Grand Marshal bade his attendant distribute ten taels of silver among the servants. Then he called for his sedan-chair and prepared to leave. He could not be persuaded to remain longer, and the officers escorted him to the gate. Then the music played again; banners and insignia were ranged in order on either side of the street. Officials went forward to clear the way, and the soldiers set out with a fine martial step. A number of officers prepared to mount their horses to accompany His Grace, but this he would not allow. He stepped into his sedan-chair and was carried away, and all the soldiers were ordered to escort him to his boat. The two senior officers, Hou and Sung, had arranged for supplies of food, and these, with their cards, they entrusted to Hu Shih-wên, the Prefect of Tung-p'ing Fu, and the Captain of the Bodyguard, Chou Hsiu, to take to the boat.

The Governor and the Censor returned to the hall and thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "This has really put you to grave inconvenience," they said, "and we do not know how to thank

you. You must tell us whether the money we sent was adequate, so that we may make up any deficiency."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed. "I am grateful to you," he said, "for entrusting to me so pleasant a duty, and making so magnificent a present. I only fear that, in my poor house, the entertainment has been unworthy of the occasion. Will you forgive me if there has been anything amiss?"

Sung thanked him again, then called for his sedan-chair and went away with the Governor. All the other officers hastened after them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the hall and gave food to the musicians and actors and they, too, went away. Four young actors alone were bidden to stay. Then all that belonged to the officers was taken away by their servants.

Seeing that it was still early, Hsi-mên Ch'ing had the tables cleared, and the food collected upon four of them. Then he sent boys to invite Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Scholar Wên, the clerks, and his son-in-law, Ch'ên Ching-chi. Many of them had risen before dawn that day and had been busy all the time, and he wished to offer them a feast in return. Before long, they all arrived and sat down to drink.

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "how long did the Grand Marshal stay? Was he pleased with his entertainment?"

"I am sure His Grace must have been pleased when he saw such a splendid feast," Han Tao-kuo said. "The Governor and the Censor were perfectly satisfied. They thanked his Lordship repeatedly."

"I can think of no other house that could offer so magnificent a reception," Po-chüeh said. "In the first place, no other house here is so spacious, and, secondly, no other house could welcome so many official people. You must have entertained at least a thousand to-day. Well, it may have been rather expensive, but your fame will spread throughout the province."

"My old teacher Ch'ên was here too," Scholar Wên said.

"Who was your teacher?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him.

"Ch'ên Chêng-hui," Scholar Wên said. "He is the son of the censor, Ch'ên Liao-wêng, a native of Chêng-ch'êng in Ho-nan. When he was only eighteen years old, he passed the senior examination. Now he is President of the Board of Education and a very learned man."

"He is about twenty-four years old now," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Food was brought in. While they were eating it, Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent for the four young actors and asked their names. They were Chou Ts'ai, Liang To, Ma Chên and Han Pi. Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to the last of them: "Are you any relation of Golden Bracelet?"

Han Pi knelt down and said: "Golden Bracelet and Jade Armlet are my younger sisters."

The mention of the girls' names reminded Hsi-mên of the Lady of the Vase. It made him sad to think that on such a glorious occasion as this she was no longer with him. "Take your instruments," he said to the boys, and sing 'The Flowers of Lo-yang and the Moon of Liang-yüan'." Han Pi and Chou Ts'ai tuned their instruments and sang.

Flowers of Lo-yang

Moon of Liang-yüan.

Perfect blossoms we may buy and keep a little while

Bright moon which, for a moment, we may borrow.

The flowers on the trellis seem so beautiful

We stretch out our wine cups to the full moon.

The moon is full, and then it wanes

The flowers blossom and then fade.

Parting is the bitterest thing in life.

The flowers fade, but Spring has still her beauty.

The moon wanes slowly, but the Autumn festival will come again.

Only we mortals die and never return.

When the song was over, Po-chüeh saw tears in Hsi-mên Ch'ing's eyes. "Brother," he said, "you told them to sing that song. Are you still thinking about your dead lady?"

Hsi-mên noticed the plates of dessert at the other side of the table. "Brother Ying," he said, "you think my mind is always upon her. Look at those dishes. When she was alive, she used to arrange them with her own hands. Now she is dead, the maids do it. You can see for yourself whether the dishes are properly set out or even fit to eat."

"Judging by this meal," Scholar Wên said, "I do not see that you have any reason to complain of your ladies."

"Brother," said Ying Po-chüeh, "you cannot get over your

grief at her loss, but to talk in this way is hardly fair to the other ladies."

As they talked and drank together, Golden Lotus was listening to them behind a curtain, secretly. When she had heard what Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, she went straight to the inner court and told the Moon Lady all about it.

"Let him say what he likes," said the Moon Lady, "it's no use your imagining you can do anything to stop him. While she was still living, she promised Hibiscus to the second lady. Now he says she has only been dead a little while and we must not give her maids to anybody yet. I said nothing, but you have seen for yourself what airs the nurse and those two maids have been giving themselves lately. If I begin to say a word to them, he says I am too rough with them."

"Heart's Delight has certainly been different the last few days," Golden Lotus said. "I am very much afraid she will turn out to be a plaguy baggage. He spends all his time with her. I hear, too, that he gave her two sets of pins and she put them in her hair so that everybody could see them."

"They are a rubbishy lot," the Moon Lady said, "and none of them seems to have any morals."

Chapter Sixty-six

THE SOLEMN SACRIFICE

His breast is filled with a thousand griefs.
The sun seems to hang over the tree-tops
Green leaves give shade and Spring has come
The grass grows thick and the oriole sings.
He cannot hear her dainty footsteps
The music of her voice comes to him only in dream
The mountain masses beyond the gate
Cannot bar the way to sorrow.

HSI-MÊN CH'ING was drinking wine with Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh and the others. He said to Han Tao-kuo: "When will the boats be ready to start? We must see about getting the goods packed up."

"Yesterday," Han Tao-kuo said, "I had word to say that the boats will sail on the twenty-fourth."

"After the twentieth we will have everything made ready," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Who is going this time?" Po-chüeh asked.

"Three in all," Hsi-mên told him. "I propose that Ts'ui shall come back first next year with a cargo of merchandise from Hang-chou. Han Tao-kuo and Lai Pao are going on to Sung-chiang and elsewhere to buy cloth. We have silk enough already in store."

"Really you are a wonderful manager," Po-chüeh said. "The proverb says: A good business-man must think of everything."

It was now the first night-watch. Uncle Wu rose. "Brother-in-law," he said, "you have been working very hard lately and we have all had quite enough to drink. I think we ought to leave you to rest."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing would not hear of their going. He ordered the young actors to pour out wine and sing more songs. But after three more cups of wine or so, they went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered six ch'ien of silver to the four young actors, but they declined the money. "We came on the instructions of his Excellency," they said. "We have done no more than our duty. How can we accept a present from you?"

"It is true you have been on duty," Hsi-mên said, "but I see no reason why you should not take the silver." The four actors took it, kotowed and went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to bed in the inner court.

The next day when he returned from the office, he found that Abbot Wu had sent one of his novices and two men to make preparations for the ceremony. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had monastic fare served to the novice, who afterwards went away. Hsi-mên asked Scholar Wên to send invitations to kinsmen, friends and neighbours, both men and women. The cooks were instructed to make the necessary preparations and especially to prepare vegetarian food to be offered to the dead lady.

Before dawn next day the priests arrived. They went upon the dais, lighted candles and burned incense. Then they began to play their instruments and recite the appropriate prayers. Outside the gate hung a long banner with an inscription, and, on either side of the gateway, a scroll of yellow paper. Upon one was written: 'By the gracious mercy of the Ruler of the East may the soul of this lady, in the light of dawn, ascend to the mansions of the blessed,' and on the other: 'By the efficacy of the *Nan Tan* may she be granted forgiveness of her offences, that her spirit, strengthened and purified, may mount to the Heavens.'

Over the dais on which the altar stood hung a scroll which announced that thirty-five texts, charms and spells were to be read to relieve from travail the soul of the dead lady, and that sacrifice would be made to bring her safely through the perils of Hades.

His Holiness Huang, wearing a scarlet robe with a gold girdle, and with many attendants following, arrived in a sedan-chair shortly after sunrise. Abbot Wu and the other clergy went to receive him. They led him to the altar. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, in black robes, came to welcome him and offered him tea. The priests were given monastic fare beside the altar. The table on which the food was set was made of red lacquer and the table-covers were all embroidered. Two boys waited beside the table. While the attendants were preparing the texts, Hsi-mên Ch'ing made his offering of a roll of gold silk.

Before he went up to the altar, his Holiness put on a 'Hat

of the Nine Thunders' and a scarlet vestment with golden clouds and the hundred cranes embroidered upon it. He recited the prologue; the priests washed their hands and offered incense. Then his Holiness incensed the altar. He burned spells to summon the angelic host, and with invocations and charms made announcement to the three Heavens and the ten Earths. They presented the three offerings. The music began and incense was burned processionaly. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ch'ên Ching-chi both had censers, and soldiers marched before them. Before them and behind were borne four parasols of gold embroidery, and banners adorned with pearls. When the procession returned, they took their places and the music struck up again. Then they went to the tablet of the Lady of the Vase and summoned her spirit to appear that they might assist her on her way to Paradise. A small table was set apart especially so that the dead lady's spirit might come there, listen to the reading of the scriptures, and hear the teaching of the true faith.

At noon, his Holiness, still wearing his hat and vestments, offered sacrifice to the stars and burned charms to despatch angelic messengers to the underworld.

This holy man Huang was not more than thirty years old. His appearance was most remarkable. Vested in his robes and engaged in the execution of these ceremonies he looked almost divine.

After this Abbot Wu, before the altar, read from the Heavenly Treasures from the Jade Book with the Tiger Seal. Then incense was burned again, and everyone went to the temporary hall for refreshment. The most imposing table was that of his Holiness; the Abbot's was slightly smaller. The others had ordinary tables. Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered his Holiness and the Abbot each a roll of satin, four pairs of flowers and four rolls of silk. The other priests each received a roll of cloth. Food for his Holiness and the Abbot was sent to the temple, and the priests bade their servers put their food into a large box. After the meal, they all went to take the air in the garden. The tables were cleared and fresh ones set for the entertainment of the kinsmen and friends who had come to the ceremony.

Meanwhile, a messenger arrived from the Eastern Capital,

with a letter from Chai. Hsi-mên Ch'ing received him in the hall. He was an official of the Imperial Tutor's household, wearing a black gown, tight-fitting trousers, with a swastika hat and yellow boots. He was fully armed. He made a reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Hsi-mên returned his greeting. Then he produced a letter and ten taels of silver. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked his name.

"My name is Wang Yü and his Lordship Chai has bidden me bring this letter to you. Until he heard the sad news of your lady's death from his Excellency An, he knew nothing about it."

"When did his Excellency's letter reach the Capital?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked.

"In the tenth month," the messenger said. "His Excellency completed his work as Warden of the Royal Forests within the year, and he has now been made Senior Secretary of the Board of Waterways. He will return to the Capital when he has finished his present work."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Lai Pao to entertain the messenger and said that he would give him a letter to take back the following day. The messenger asked where Han Tao-kuo lived, saying that he had a letter to deliver to him, and that he would like to see him at once because he had to return to the Capital with the least possible delay. Hsi-mên sent for Han Tao-kuo and the two men had a meal together, after which the messenger went with Han Tao-kuo to his house.

Hsi-mên was greatly pleased to receive this letter and showed it to Scholar Wên. "When you write the answer for me," he said, "the style must be as good as this. I am sending him ten kerchiefs, ten kerchiefs of silk, ten pairs of gold tooth-picks and ten gold wine-cups. The messenger will come to-morrow for my letter."

Scholar Wên read the letter:

Chai Ch'ien, your kinsman in the Capital, presents his most humble salutations. At the onset of winter he sends this letter to his Lordship Hsi-mên Ssü-ch'üan, officer of the Imperial Guard.

Since we last parted at the Capital, there has been no opportunity for us to meet, and this is a matter of great

regret to me. I have told my master how much I long to see you.

The first sad news of your lady's death came to me from An Fêng-shan. It distresses me beyond measure that I cannot come in person to offer my sympathy. It is most unfortunate, most unfortunate! I can only hope that you will not allow yourself to give way utterly to your grief. As a slight token of my feeling for you, I send a small present which I trust you will accept.

I am informed that your activities in the public service are so meritorious that the people of Ch'ing Ho cannot too loudly sing your praises. There can be no doubt that after the general inspection this year, you will receive promotion. The other day report was made of those officers whose work merited the highest approbation and I asked my master to place your name in the list. When the work is completed, his Majesty will distribute awards and you will be given the post of Senior Magistrate. His Lordship Hsia's period of office will shortly expire and he will receive a higher appointment. I tell you this before the matter is made public.

I trust this letter will give you pleasure, but pray keep its contents to yourself and do not say anything to his Lordship. Keep the matter a complete secret.

The noble Yang died in prison on the twenty-ninth day of last month.

Scholar Wên finished reading this letter and was putting it into his sleeve when Ying Po-chüeh took it from him and read it again. When he gave it back to the scholar he said: "Sir, you must take great pains over the answer. There are many men of learning at the capital and we mustn't have them laughing at us."

"I," said Scholar Wên, "am like a dog's tail. It can be used instead of ermine when there is no ermine to be had. There is little depth to my learning and who am I to wield a battle-axe among the military gentlemen? I can only do what my duty requires of me."

"Scholar Wên will do admirably anything he is asked to do," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What do you understand about matters of this sort, you dog?"

When they had finished their meal, he told Lai Hsing to give food to the kinsmen, friends and neighbours who had come. He bade Tai An take return gifts to the singing-girls who had sent presents. To each of them he gave a roll of cloth and a tael of silver. In the afternoon, he sent for Li Ming, Wu Hui and Chêng Fêng.

The priests returned to the altar. They beat their drums, made obeisance to the gods, and chanted their texts. Then they set up lanterns, burned paper offerings, and so went on until it was dark. By the time they had done it was already the first night-watch. Uncle Hua decided to remain, Hsi-mên Ch'ing having detained him, but Master Ch'iao and Uncles Shên and Mêng went away. The two uncles Wu, Ying Po-chüeh, Hsieh Hsi-ta, Scholar Wên and Ch'ang Chih-chieh stayed with the clerks to watch the ceremonies during the night.

In the great court, a high dais had been erected with a decorated arch. A tank of water and a pool of fire had been prepared with offerings of food for the spirits. The tablet of the Lady of the Vase was placed upon a table, and offerings of every sort were set out before it. Beside the tablet were three banners, one for her spirit, one red one, and one yellow one. There was an inscription which read: 'Away, ye evil spirits! This is holy ground. The purification of the Southern Palace has here been made.'

The priests played their instruments, sitting in two ranks. Beside them stood four young novices, one bearing a wand, another a basin, another a double-edged sword. His Holiness put on a golden mitre for the banishment of demons, and an embroidered vestment. Then going up to the highest point he chanted the following verses:

May the mercy of the ineffable one descend
And the gates to the passes of the underworld
Shall open one by one.
Novices, walking two by two, lead the way
And the soul of the departed, purified and cleansed,
Shall reach the abode of the blessed.

Then he burned incense again and sang: "The Mighty One hath revealed the way of truth and shown mercy to them

that dwell in darkness. He hath said that all who mortify the flesh shall come to immortality. He bestoweth blessings upon the people, both of this world and of the world to come. His mercy is outpoured over all in danger, famine or distress. We burn incense, and implore the Most High, the Most Gracious, the Ineffable One, and all the Immortals in all the Worlds, to come to our aid this day. All we who live in this world of dust are fettered by the things of this world. Death is a mystery to us; we long for life. Few there are who plant good seed and many are they who go on the wrong path. We are foolish and do not understand; we yield ourselves to greed and passion. We believe that we shall live for ever and forget the death that cometh so easily. One day we die and all is over. Yet our sin remaineth, and we suffer punishment in Hell.

"Therefore, as Thou hast taught us, we make sacrifice for this dead woman. She departed and went to the world of darkness, and, if we offer not sacrifice for the remission of her sins, she must suffer the most dreadful torments. We implore Thee, O Most High, grant Thy mercy and save us who cry to Thee. Let Thy most gracious light shine upon us that we may be enlightened. Bid Thine angels be merciful unto us, and send forth Thy decree to the Powers of Hell that they cease their examination of her who is dead. Bid them open the prison gates and set the prisoner free. Pardon her sins and let hatred be stilled.

"Let all obey Thy commands and come forth from the gates of Hell.

"Let her pass over this fire that her weakness may become strength, and that she be not as a faded flower.

"Grant unto her another life, and bring her safely to the shores of Truth.

"To this end we burn these sacred spells, beseeching Thee to hear our prayer."

The priests dipped the spirit's banner into the pool of water and burned charms. They took the red banner, put it into the pit of fire and burned charms again. Then they took the yellow banner. His Holiness said: "From Heaven cometh the water and from Earth the fire. From their meeting cometh life itself." So the ceremony came to an end. The tablet was carried over the decorated bridge to pay respect to the God

and to take refuge with the Three Divinities of the Taoist Faith. Then five sets of offerings were made.

"Now," said his Holiness, "she has found the three refuges. We will pronounce the nine commandments." The nine commandments were read. The priests played their instruments and recited many charms. Then they implored a blessing upon the soul of the dead woman and all other souls.

His Holiness came down from the dais. The others, still playing their music, followed him and went out of the gate to burn paper money, treasure chests and other things. This was the end. The priests returned and took off their vestments. People from the temple rolled up the pictures.

In the great hall, Hsi-mên Ch'ing had ordered many tables to be prepared. The lights shone very brightly. The three young actors sang, and all the relatives and friends sat there. Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered his Holiness a cup of wine, with two rolls of silk and ten taels of silver. Upon his knees, he said: "Now that my dead wife has had the benefit of your blessing, she will be able to enter paradise. I am most grateful to you, and this offering is a token of my gratitude."

"I am ashamed," said his Holiness, "that my priest's robe should cover one so unworthy to profess Holy Religion. Not any virtue of mine but your own sincerity will send your wife to paradise. I feel that I ought not to accept your gift."

"It is but a trifle," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "and really utterly unworthy of you. I can only pray that you will smile and accept it."

His Holiness then bade his novices remove the gifts.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered a cup of wine to Abbot Wu, with a roll of silk and five taels of silver. Ten taels more were for the expenses of the ceremony.

"I will accept the fee and no more," said the Abbot. "You have always been extremely generous to me and I could do no less than perform this ceremony for your lady. Indeed I ought not even to take the fee, so how dare I accept the rest?"

"Teacher," Hsi-mên said, "though his Holiness performed the actual ceremony, you had all the trouble of the preparations. I must insist."

The Abbot was obliged to accept. He thanked Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then Hsi-mên offered wine to all the other priests,

spreading the blessing, as it is said. Uncle Wu and Ying Po-chüeh helped him, Uncle Wu passing the cups, and Po-chüeh pouring out the wine. Hsieh Hsi-ta took round the food. They knelt down.

"To-day," Po-chüeh said, "we have done excellent work. We are delighted to have his Holiness with us and we are greatly obliged to Abbot Wu for the trouble he has taken. I have no doubt that all that has been done will greatly benefit my dead sister-in-law. Though this is largely due to the supreme powers of his Holiness, yet, Brother, your earnest sincerity must have had its part." He offered a cup of wine to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"Gentlemen," Hsi-mên said, "I have troubled you greatly these last few days and I do not know how to thank you." With these words he drained the cup.

Ying Po-chüeh filled another cup. "Drink this, Brother, and make it a pair. I would not have you drink a single one." Hsieh Hsi-ta helped Hsi-mên to some food. In return, Hsi-mên Ch'ing offered wine to them and they sat down. The actors sang and the cooks brought more and more food. They guessed fingers, played games and, with music and singing, drank until the second night-watch. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing was drunk and everybody went away. He gave three ch'ien of silver to the actors, and went to the inner court.

Chapter Sixty-seven

*HSI-MÊN CH'ING DREAMS OF THE LADY
OF THE VASE*

The wind blows from the north
And the ground is covered with flakes of jade.
The white earth and the river are made one.
A cold mist rises above the waves: it is like a screen.
The mountains are covered with grey cloud
And the cloud links them with the water.
The withered grass seems to be dead.

His thoughts were far as the red cloud
The gentle spirit was sad, and the memory bitter
Night after night, only a kind dream
Could give him sleep.

Do not stand alone on the high building
When the moon is waning.
The wine descending to a sorrowing breast
Turns to tears of love.

HSI-MÊN CH'ING was very tired when he went to the inner court to sleep. He did not rise next day until the sun was high in the heavens. Lai Hsing came and said to him: "The builders are here. They wish to know if they shall pull down the temporary buildings."

"Yes, tell them to demolish everything," Hsi-mên answered angrily. "Why do you come and bother me?"

The builders unfastened the mats and ropes and took down the pinewood posts. They carried them to the house on the other side of the road and there stored them.

Flute of Jade came and said to Hsi-mên: "The weather is very threatening." He told her to bring his clothes so that he might get up.

"You are very tired and the weather looks bad," the Moon Lady said. "Stay in bed. What is there for you to do if you get up so early? Don't go to the office to-day."

"I am not going to the office," Hsi-mên said, "but Chai's messenger is coming for my answer."

"Then you had better get up," the Moon Lady said, "and I will tell them to make some gruel for you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing got up but did not wash. He put on a velvet gown and a felt hat and went to his study in the garden. Now that Shu T'ung had gone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing had told Wang Ching to wait upon him in this study and Ch'un Hung to look after the study in the outer court. In winter Hsi-mên usually came to this garden study. There was a fire beneath the floor and a large bronze brazier. The winter blinds were drawn. In the middle room were some *chia chih* peaches, chrysanthemums of many different kinds, a few slender bamboos of great delicacy, and orchids. Writing materials and vases with the plum-blossom pattern-books, and musical instruments were set out with great care.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing came in, Wang Ching hastened to burn incense in a small gold burner. Hsi-mên bade him tell Lai An to go for Ying Po-chüeh. Then P'ing An came and told Wang Ching that Little Chou, the barber, had come. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave orders that he should be sent in. The barber came and kotowed.

"You have come at the right moment," Hsi-mên said to him. "Now comb my hair and massage my body." He asked the barber why it was so long since he had last been there.

"I heard that the Sixth Lady had died and that you were very busy."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sat down on a comfortable chair and Little Chou dressed his hair. Lai An came with Ying Po-chüeh. Po-chüeh was wearing a felt hat, a green velvet gown, and a pair of old black boots with palm-leaf goloshes over them. He made a reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên, who was still having his hair dressed, told him not to stand on ceremony but to sit down. Ying Po-chüeh pulled out a chair and sat down beside the brazier.

"Why are you dressed like this?" Hsi-mên said.

"Don't you know?" said Po-chüeh. "It is snowing and very cold. I did not get home before cock-crow and this morning I did not feel at all anxious to get up. If you hadn't sent your boy, I should have been asleep still. You must be strong or you wouldn't be able to get up so early. If I were in your place I should never get up at all."

"No," said Hsi-mên, "I don't suppose you would. You know all I have had to do of late. First the funeral, then Grand Marshal Huang to entertain, and now this last ceremony. I have had no rest at all. This morning, my wife said to me: 'You must be tired; stay in bed for a while,' but I remembered that Chai's messenger was coming for an answer to the letter he brought, and I wanted to see the temporary buildings pulled down. On the twenty-fourth, Clerk Han and the others are to start for the south. Then, during the funeral ceremonies, my kinsmen and friends have been very kind. I ought to go and visit them but, in the circumstances, perhaps I may be excused. But at least I must go and see the officers of rank who came to the funeral."

"I am afraid you can't escape that," Po-chüeh said, "but, as for the others, if I were you, I should get somebody to go and call on them on your behalf. You can thank them when you see them. They all know how busy you are and they will understand."

As they were talking, Hua T'ung brought two cups of milk with sugar and cream. Po-chüeh took one. The milk was so white that it looked like goose fat with the cream floating on the top. "This is a great treat," he said. "Nice and hot too!" He drank the milk, and found it so sweet that he had no difficulty in finishing it. Little Chou finished Hsi-mên Ch'ing's hair and began to clean his ears. Hsi-mên set down his cup of milk.

"Drink your milk, Brother," Po-chüeh said. "Don't let it get cold. A man like you ought to drink milk. It is so nourishing."

"I don't want it," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "You drink it. My gruel will be coming shortly."

Ying Po-chüeh liked it very much. He picked up the cup and drank it straight off.

The barber finished cleaning Hsi-mên's ears and took a roller to massage his body.

"Do you enjoy being rolled like this?" Po-chüeh said.

"I have a good deal of pain in the back," Hsi-mên said. "I need the massage."

"Well, you are very stout, and you have such rich food every day you must have a good deal of heat inside you."

"Doctor Jên has said to me more than once: 'Sir, though you seem so stout, you are really not very strong,'" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "He gave me a box of tonic, reinvigorating, pills. He told me that these pills had originally been made for his Majesty by his Holiness Lin, and recommended me to take one every morning with human milk. But the last few days I have had so much to do I forgot all about the pills. You are always saying that I have too many ladies and that I see too much of them, but since the Sixth Lady died, I have had so much on my mind I have never thought about such things."

Then Han Tao-kuo came in. "I have just heard that our boat has been chartered," he said. "We shall be able to start on the twenty-fourth as we proposed."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Clerk Kan to go into the accounts, get the silver ready, and see that everything was packed up the following day. He said to Han Tao-kuo: "How much money have we made in our two shops?"

"About six thousand taels all together," Han Tao-kuo said.

Hsi-mên told him to give two thousand taels to Ts'ui Pên, so that he could go and buy goods at Hu-chou, and to take the remaining four thousand to buy cloth at Sung-chiang with Lai Pao. "You will come back by one of the first boats next year," he said. He told each of them to take five taels and go home to get ready.

"There is one matter which I must mention," Han Tao-kuo said. "I am detailed to a tour of duty in Duke Yün's palace. They say I must go in person and will not accept substitute money. What shall I do?"

"You are in the same position as Lai Pao," Hsi-mên said. "He gets out of it by simply paying three ch'iens of silver every month."

"Brother Lai Pao was appointed by his Eminence the Imperial Tutor," Han Tao-kuo said. "The papers came, and the authorities at the palace dare not say a word. But I have to serve because my ancestors have always served. I can't do what he does."

"Go and write out a statement of your case and I will ask Doctor Jên to go to the palace and arrange matters with Master Wang. I am sure they will take your name off the

register and allow you to give money in place of service. After that, you will only need to send a man there once a month."

Han Tao-kuo bowed and thanked him.

"Brother," Ying Po-chüeh said, "if you can arrange this matter for him, he will be much easier in mind when he starts for the south."

By this time the massage was finished, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the inner court to dress. He told a servant to give Little Chou something to eat. Some time later he returned, wearing a white velvet hat and a velvet cloak, and gave the barber three ch'ien of silver. He told Wang Ching to go for Scholar Wên. The scholar came, wearing a tall hat and a broad girdle. They greeted one another, and a servant laid the table and brought in gruel. Ying Po-chüeh and Scholar Wên sat in the places of honour, Hsi-mên Ch'ing in the host's seat, and Han Tao-kuo in the lower place. Hsi-mên called for another bowl of gruel and a pair of chop-sticks for Ch'ên Ching-chi. Ching-chi, wearing a white hat and white gown, bowed to Po-chüeh and the others and sat down beside Han Tao-kuo. They soon finished the gruel and the things were cleared away. Han Tao-kuo left them.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Scholar Wên whether he had written the letter. "I have a rough draft here," Scholar Wên said, "and when you have approved it, I will write it again." He took the draft from his sleeve and gave it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. It read:

To the great and virtuous statesman, my worthy kinsman Yün Fêng.

The time has flown since we parted at the Capital, and already half a year has passed. Sorrow has come upon me and I have lost my wife. You, from so great a distance, have been gracious enough to send an offering. And you have sent a letter that I value highly, an earnest of your kind feeling and generous actions. I am greatly indebted to you and shall never forget your kindness. My only fear is that my delinquencies in the office may bring disgrace upon you, since my position there is due to you. I trust that you will speak kindly for me to his Eminence. All that I have is of your giving.

I take this opportunity of asking after your well-being. I have thought of you continually.

With this letter I send ten silken Yang-chou handkerchiefs, ten of coloured silk, twenty gold tooth-picks and ten gold cups. These are but a slight token of my regard, and I trust you will accept them with indulgence.

Your kinsman Hsi-mên Ch'ing of Ch'ing Ho.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had read the letter, he told Ching-chi to pack up the presents. He asked Scholar Wên to copy the letter upon fine paper and seal it with his seal. Then he gave five taels of silver to the messenger Wang Yü.

The snow was heavier than before. Hsi-mên invited Scholar Wên to stay with him in the study and admire the beauty of the landscape. The servants cleared the tables and brought wine. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing saw someone peeping through the blind and asked who was there. Wang Ching told him it was Chêng Ch'un. Hsi-mên called the boy in, and he came, carrying two boxes. He lifted them high before him, then knelt down before Hsi-mên Ch'ing. A small golden square box was opened and Hsi-mên asked what was in it. "My sister Moonbeam," said the boy, "knows how busy and tired you have been, and she sends you these two boxes of cakes." One of the two boxes contained pastries filled with fruits, and the other, pastries shaped like a spiral shell. "My sister prepared them with her own hands," Chêng Ch'un said. "She knows you like them and made them specially for you."

"It is only a day or two since you brought me some tea," Hsi-mên said, "and now your sister has sent me these delightful pastries. I am very grateful to her."

"Splendid!" Ying Po-chüeh said. "Hand them to me. I'll see what they're like. My daughter, who used to make these pastries so well, is dead, but now, I see, I have another daughter who knows how to make them." He picked up one and put it in his mouth. Then he took another and gave it to Scholar Wên, saying: "Here, old gentleman, try this. You will find it will make your teeth grow again and give new life to your flesh and bones. I give you my word: to have rare things like this is better than ten years added to one's life."

Scholar Wên put the pastry into his mouth. It seemed to melt at once. "Cakes like this," he said, "come from the west. They are not the kind of thing one sees every day. They ease the lungs and bring a feeling of genuine delight. A rarity indeed!"

"What is in the little box?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Chêng Ch'un.

The boy knelt down again and handed the box to Hsi-mên. "My sister has sent this for you alone," he said, softly.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing put the box on his knee, but, before he could open it, Ying Po-chüeh snatched it away from him and opened it. There was a red silk handkerchief inside, embroidered with a pattern of entwined hearts, and in the handkerchief were melon-seeds that Moonbeam had cracked with her own teeth. Po-chüeh tossed the handkerchief to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, grabbed two handfuls of melon-seeds and crammed them into his mouth. Hsi-mên Ch'ing tried to stop him, but by this time there were only a few seeds left.

"You dog," cried Hsi-mên, "are you starving? She sent them for me. Give them to me at once."

"It was my daughter who sent them," Po-chüeh said, "so it is right and proper that I should have them. You, my son, have too many good things already."

"If Scholar Wên were not here," Hsi-mên said, "I would tell you what I think about you. You dog, you really go beyond all bounds." He put the handkerchief in his sleeve and told Wang Ching to take the boxes to the inner court. Food and wine were brought. When they had drunk a cup of wine, Tai An came and said that Li and Huang had come to pay their debt.

"How much have they brought?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked.

"They have brought a thousand taels," Tai An said, "and they say they will pay more later."

"The ungodly scoundrels," Po-chüeh cried, "they have deceived me. They never said a word to me about it. No wonder they did not put in an appearance during the ceremony. They must have been to Tung-p'ing Fu for the money. Take it, Brother, and have done with them. They have had credit enough. I shouldn't be surprised if, later, they weren't able to pay. I knew that Eunuch Hsüeh was going to Tung-p'ing Fu

to get some money for himself yesterday. I hoped that all the money would not go to that old ox, because I knew there wasn't any hope that you would get your money back if he got hold of it."

"I am not worrying about him," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "If they don't pay, I shall clap them into gaol." He told Ch'ên Ching-chi to get the scales and weigh the silver. "Then I will go and see them," he said.

Ching-chi came back. "I have weighed the silver," he said, "and there are exactly a thousand taels. I gave it to the Great Lady. Huang IV says he would like to speak to you."

"Go and tell him I am entertaining some guests," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "He must come back after the twenty-fourth. I know he wants to get out of his contract."

"No," said Ching-chi. "He says it is another matter about which he would like to speak to you. It is a favour he wishes to ask."

"Then I will go and see him," Hsi-mên said.

When he came to the hall, Huang IV kotowed and said: "I have now paid a thousand taels to your son-in-law and I will pay shortly the remainder. There is another matter about which I should like to ask your help." He knelt down and burst into tears.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing raised him and asked what was the matter.

"My wife's father, Sun Ch'ing, and his partner, Fêng II, are in the cotton business at Tung-ch'ang. Fêng II has a son, Fêng Huai, a very unfilial fellow, who spends all his time at bawdy-houses. One day he stole two bales of cotton. My father-in-law remonstrated with his partner, and Fêng II gave his son a beating. Then the young man made trouble with my wife's brother, Sun Wên, and there was a fight. He knocked out one of my brother-in-law's teeth, but not before he had taken a hard knock on the head. Bystanders stopped the fight and Fêng's son went home, but something went wrong, and he died about a fortnight later. The dead young man's father-in-law is a notorious scamp of Ho-hsi. His name is Pai V, but he is nicknamed Profiteer Pai and is a harbourer of rogues and villains. He put up Fêng II to bring an accusation, and Fêng went to the court to accuse the Suns. The magistrate appointed Captain Li to investigate the case, but his Lordship

was then awaiting the arrival of the Imperial barge and the matter was delegated to T'ung, one of the magistrates of the Prefecture. Pai bribed the magistrate and persuaded some of the neighbours to give false evidence. They swore that, when the two young men were fighting, my father-in-law encouraged them. T'ung has sent to arrest my father-in-law. I have come to you to beg you to have pity and write a letter to Captain Li on his behalf. What I suggest is that, when my father-in-law has been in prison for a few days, Captain Li should be approached again. In the first place, my father-in-law had nothing whatever to do with the fighting and, secondly, the young man died so long after the actual fight that it was beyond the recognised limit. Besides, his own father had punished him first, so that it cannot be definitely said that Sun Wên was the cause of his death."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at the paper Huang IV had brought. It said: 'Sun Ch'ing and Sun Wên, now held in prison at Tung-ch'ang, implore your favour and your gracious help.'

"Captain Li was here only the other day," Hsi-mên said. "It was the first time we had met, so we can hardly be called intimate friends. How can I approach him in this matter?"

Huang IV knelt down again. He cried and said: "You must have compassion on them or both father and son will perish. If Sun Wên cannot be saved, at least let us save my father-in-law. It will be a noble act on your part. My father-in-law is sixty years old. If he is kept in prison during the wintry weather, it will certainly kill him."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing thought for a long time. Then he said: "I will write to his Lordship Ch'ien of the Customs. He will speak to Captain Li. They passed their examination in the same year."

Once more Huang IV knelt down. He took from his sleeve a card which said: 'A hundred sacks of finest rice.' He handed this to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and then brought out two parcels of silver. Hsi-mên said he wanted none of his money.

"If it is no use to you," Huang IV said, "you might perhaps pass it on to his Lordship Ch'ien."

"Don't trouble about that," Hsi-mên said. "If the matter is settled, I will send him some presents."

Ying Po-chüeh came through the corner door.

"Brother," he said, "do nothing for this fellow Huang IV. He is the sort of man who never burns incense to Buddha yet comes to fall before the knees of Buddha when he is in difficulties. Remember that, when you had the service for your dead lady, he never even sent you tea. Nor did he come himself. Why should you trouble about him?"

Huang IV bowed to Ying Po-chüeh. "Good uncle!" he said, "this is a serious matter and you are sentencing men to death. For the last month this business has kept me on the run and I couldn't find a moment to come here. Yesterday I went to the office for the money and to-day I have come to pay my debt and to ask his Lordship's aid to save my father-in-law. His Lordship refuses to take my offering and I fear he is not willing to help me."

Po-chüeh saw a hundred taels of snow-white silver. "Brother," he said, "are you going to do anything for him?"

"I don't know Captain Li well enough," Hsi-mên said, "but I will buy a present of some sort and ask Ch'ien to do what he can. I don't think I can take this money from Huang IV."

"Then you make a mistake," Po-chüeh said. "He comes and asks you for help, and it is not right that you should be put to expense in the matter. If you refuse to accept it, it will look as though you thought the gift too small. Take my advice and accept the money. If you don't need it yourself, pass it on to his Lordship Ch'ien. Now, in Brother Huang's presence, I say that the fate of his father- and brother-in-law is entirely a question of luck. There is no knowing whether, even if the letter is delivered, they will get off scot-free. His Lordship here is no money-grubber. I think you ought to offer us a feast at the bawdy-house."

"Uncle," Huang IV said, "if you do this for me, you may be sure I shall offer you wine. Indeed, I shall make my brother-in-law come and kotow to you. I may tell you that I have busied myself day and night over this affair and, hitherto, I have failed to get anyone to help me. If you refuse, I shall not know where to turn."

"You silly thing!" Po-chüeh said, "of course it is a serious matter for you. You sleep with his daughter."

"Yes, indeed," Huang IV said, "and she cries all the time."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing yielded to Po-chüeh's persuasion and took the card, but he still refused the silver. Huang IV implored him to take it, and went out, leaving it behind. Ying Po-chüeh called him back and asked when he wanted the letter.

"It is very urgent," Huang IV said, "and I should like it at once. To-morrow morning I will send my son with your servant to deliver it. I should like to speak to the servant you decide to send."

"I will write the letter now," Hsi-mên said. He sent for Tai An and said to him: "To-morrow morning you will have to take a letter." Then Huang IV spoke to the boy and they went out. When he came to the gate, he asked Tai An to get for him the purse in which he had brought the silver. The boy went to the inner court to ask the Moon Lady for it. She was making clothes with her two maids. Tai An waited, but the Moon Lady said to him:

"We are too busy. We can't give it you now. Tell him he shall have it to-morrow."

"But he wants it very urgently," Tai An said. "He has to go to Tung-ch'ang to-morrow, and he won't be able to come back. Please take the silver out of it and let me have the purse."

"Go and give him the thing and get rid of him," the Moon Lady said to Flute of Jade.

Flute of Jade went to the inner room and emptied the silver on to the bed. She brought the purse to Tai An. "Take it away, you rascal," she said to him. "Nobody is going to eat it. What a nuisance you are!"

"If it hadn't been wanted, I shouldn't have troubled you," the boy said. He went out with the purse. When he reached the second door, a piece of silver, about three taels in weight, dropped out. One of the wrappers had been torn, and, when Flute of Jade had emptied the silver in such a hurry, she did not notice that this piece had been left in the bottom of the bag. "What a stroke of luck," Tai An said to himself. "Money for nothing!" He put it in his sleeve. He gave the purse to Huang IV and promised to bring the letter the next morning.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the study and asked Scholar Wên to write the letter. Then he gave it to Tai An.

They looked out over the snow. It seemed like willow-fluff blowing in the wind, or withered pear-blossoms dancing. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had a jar of doubly strong *Ma Ku* wine opened, and told Ch'un Hung to warm some. Meanwhile Chêng Ch'un played for them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing bade him play 'The Wind blows softly through the Willows'.

Ch'in T'ung came and said that Han Tao-kuo had given him a paper to show his master. Hsi-mên read it and said to the boy: "Take this to Doctor Jên's house and ask him to go to the palace and have Han's name taken off the list."

"It is too late now to go outside the city," Ch'in T'ung said. "Shall I go to-morrow morning?"

Hsi-mên Ch'ing agreed. Then Lai An brought a square box with several dishes and two large plates of pies made of goose-fat and rose flowers. Ch'ên Ching-chi shared their meal. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Wang Ching to give three dishes and some pies to Chêng Ch'un and two large cups of wine. Chêng Ch'un knelt down and said: "I never drink wine."

"You foolish boy," Ying Po-chüeh said, "it is very very cold, and, besides, it is your father who offers it to you. You know your brother always has some."

"My brother may drink wine, but it is not for me," said the boy.

"Drink one cup," Po-chüeh said, "and I will ask Wang Ching to drink the other for you."

But Wang Ching said he never touched wine.

"Foolish boy," Po-chüeh said, "I am asking you to drink one for Chêng Ch'un. You ought to know by now that young people should not refuse anything their elders give them. You must drink it." He stood up. Wang Ching held his nose and swallowed the wine.

"Dog!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What right have you to force him to drink?"

The boy drank only half a cup. Ying Po-chüeh told Ch'un Hung to drink the rest and asked him to sing some southern songs.

"Wait a moment," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I am going to have a game with Scholar Wên and he can sing while we drink. That will be fun." He told Wang Ching to get the dice-box and asked Scholar Wên to throw the dice first.

"I dare not," said Wên. "I ought to ask Master Ying to begin. What is your honourable name, worthy Sir?"

"My poor name is Nan-p'o,"¹ Po-chüeh said.

"I will explain it to you, Master," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said jokingly. "So many gentlemen come to his place that there is no chance for him to get at the thing he keeps under the bed. In the evening, when he can get at it, he dare not pour it out in the street for fear his neighbours will curse him, so he tells his maid to take it to the south and empty it against the granary wall. That's why his second name is Nan-p'o."

Scholar Wên laughed. "But that is a different *p'o*. The character for 'pouring' has the water radical on one side and the word *fa* on the other. This *p'o* has the earth radical and the word *p'i*."

"*P'i* is the very word, Master," Hsi-mên said. "There are always *p'i tzü* (southerners) with his wife."

"I did not mean that," Scholar Wên said, laughing.

"Master," Po-chüeh said, "you don't know him. He is always making nasty jokes about people."

"A little joking serves to liven things up," the scholar said.

"Let us begin our game," Po-chüeh said. "Don't bother about him. His mouth is always dribbling. Please begin. Don't stand on ceremony."

"When I throw the dice," Scholar Wên said, "we will have a quotation from some poem, or song, or some classical work, which must have the word 'snow' in it. If we can think of one, we drink a small cup; if not, a large one." He threw a one. "I know," he said, "it is long since snow fell on the wild bird's island." He passed the dice-box to Ying Po-chüeh, who threw a five.

Po-chüeh thought for a long time but could not think what to say. "This is really terrible," he muttered. Finally he cried: "I've got it! The plum flowers in the snow open their snow-white blossoms. What do you think of that?"

"That won't do," Scholar Wên said. "You said 'snow' twice."

"That's all right," Po-chüeh said, "big snow and little snow!"

¹ This means, literally, 'pouring at the south'.

"What nonsense you always talk, you dog," Hsi-mên said. He told Wang Ching to give Po-chüeh a large cup of wine, and bade Ch'un Hung sing a southern song.

The night was chill and the traveller hungry
He went to the village to seek an inn.
Snow hovers gently over the temples
And drops thickly on the places for dancing.
Now he must stay awhile.
On the bank of the river he goes cheerfully
To see the plum blossoms.
In the courtyard, people with silver candles
Go to appreciate the snow
White snow, falling endlessly
Dancing in the air like willow fluff.

Po-chüeh was enjoying his wine when Lai An brought fresh pastries and dessert. There were conch-shaped light pastries and things that looked like small black balls, wrapped in orange leaves. Po-chüeh picked one up and put it to his nose. It smelled very sweet. He put it into his mouth. It tasted like honey and he thought it most delicious. He could not imagine what it was. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him to guess.

"Sugar-coated soap," Po-chüeh said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Sugar-coated soap would hardly be so pleasant," he said.

"I would say: 'Plum pastry-balls,' but there is a kernel."

"Come here, you dog, and I'll tell you," Hsi-mên said, "for I don't suppose you will ever guess. They were brought for me from Hang-chou by one of my people, and are called 'coated plums'. There are various kinds of medicine inside. The medicine is mixed with honey and the plums are steeped in the mixture. Finally, they are covered with peppermint and orange-leaves. That is why they taste so pleasant. Taken every morning, they are excellent for the chest. They get rid of foul breath, are useful against phlegm, tone down the effects of wine, and are splendid for the digestion. They are much better than plum pastry-balls."

"How should I ever have thought of that if you hadn't told me?" Po-chüeh said. "Master Wên, I think I'll have another." He said to Wang Ching: "Bring me some paper, I'm going to take a couple home to my wife." He picked up one of the

shell-shaped pastries. "Is it true," he asked Chêng Ch'un, "that your sister made these herself?"

Chêng Ch'un knelt down and said: "Do you think I would lie to you? Moonbeam spent hours over these few pastries."

"She did a good work," Po-chüeh said. "Look! They are marked exactly like real shells. The colours, red and white, stand out ever so clearly."

"My son," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "when you talk like this you make me think of her who is gone. She was the only one in my house who could make them, and, now she is no more, there is no one here to take her place."

"I told you some time ago that that does not trouble me," Po-chüeh said. "One of my daughters is dead, but there is still another to make such pastries for me. I must say you are a wonderful man to discover such wonderful people."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed until his eyes were no more than a narrow slit. He slapped Ying Po-chüeh and told him not to talk such nonsense. Scholar Wên said: "Gentlemen, no one can help seeing what good friends you are."

"Don't say that," Po-chüeh said, "he is your nephew, you know."

"For twenty years, Master," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I have been his stepfather."

Seeing them making fun with one another, Ch'ên Ching-chi stood up and went away. Scholar Wên put his hand before his mouth and laughed. Ying Po-chüeh drank his wine. It was Hsi-mên Ch'ing's turn to throw the dice. He threw a seven. For a long time he racked his brains for a verse. Then he said: "I will give you a quotation from the 'Perfumed Girdle'. 'The Lord of the East will go away, for the pear-flowers look like snow.'"

"No," Ying Po-chüeh said, "that won't do. The word 'snow' must be the ninth. You must drink a large cup." He filled a cup of wine to the brim, gave it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and told Ch'un Hung to sing. "My child," he said to him, "if one may judge by the number of date-stones in your belly, you must know more than a song or two." Ch'un Hung sang another song.

It was getting dark and lights were brought. When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had finished his wine, Po-chüeh said: "Your son-in-law

has gone, so Scholar Wên will have to finish the game." Scholar Wên again threw a one. As he was thinking what to say, his eyes caught sight of a pair of scrolls hanging on the wall. On them was written, 'The wind rustles the tender willows. It is night upon the bridge. The snowflakes gently touch the frozen plums. There is Spring in the tiny courtyard'. He took the line beginning 'Snowflakes' for his quotation.

"We can't have that," Ying Po-chüeh said. "That doesn't come from your memory. You must drink a large cup." Ch'un Hung offered wine to Scholar Wên. He drank it and it made him drowsy. He nodded his head. Then he got up and excused himself. Po-chüeh would have kept him, but Hsi-mên Ch'ing said:

"No, a scholar is a man of education and cannot drink much wine." He told Hua T'ung to take Master Wên home. This was what Scholar Wên desired. He got up and took leave of them.

Po-chüeh said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "Scholar Wên is really a poor creature. He has had very little to drink, yet he is drunk already." He and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went on with their drinking.

At last Po-chüeh himself stood up. "The ground is slippery, and I must go now," he said. "Don't forget, Brother, to see that Tai An takes the letter to-morrow."

"Didn't you see me give it to him?" Hsi-mên said. "He will go in the morning."

Ying Po-chüeh pulled aside the lattice. The sky was full of clouds and the ground was like ice. He asked for a lantern and for Chêng Ch'un to go with him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave the boy five ch'ien of silver, and filled a jar with the coated plums and put them in a box for Moonbeam. As they were going away, Hsi-mên said to Po-chüeh: "Be good with your younger brother."

"That is enough!" Po-chüeh replied. "We are father and son and shall behave as such. But I may go and have a chat with that little whore Moonbeam."

Ch'in T'ung took them to the gate. Hsi-mên Ch'ing saw that the tables were cleared, then, supported by Lai An, who carried a lantern, he went to the corner door. He passed by Golden Lotus's door, which was closed, and quietly went on to the rooms of the Lady of the Vase. He knocked gently and

Welcome Spring opened the door. Lai An went back. Hsi-mên entered the room and looked at the portrait of his dead wife. He asked whether they had offered food before it. "We have just made an offering," Heart's Delight told him.

Hsi-mên sat down on a chair and Welcome Spring brought him tea. He told her to help him undress. Heart's Delight, finding that he was going to spend the night, quickly made the bed and warmed it with a hot-water bottle. Then she helped him to bed and Hibiscus went out to shut the corner door. The two maids went to sleep in the other room.

When he asked for more tea, the maids were too sleepy to wish to get it. They told Heart's Delight to hurry. She took off her clothes and got into bed with him. The wine he had drunk had aroused Hsi-mên's passions. *Aliquantum medicamenti secreti cepit et in penem fibulam imposuit. in tergo mulier iacuit; ille cruribus divaricatis ferox se urgebat dum lingua alterius frigeret et cunnus fonte largo rigaretur.* She called him all the tender names she could think of. It was the middle of the night and so silent that the noise they made might have been heard far away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing found the woman's body as yielding as down. He put his arms round her and kissed her, then told her to squat upon the bed et sugere. She did so, to his great satisfaction.

"My child," Hsi-mên said to her, "your skin is as white as the Sixth Lady's was. Being with you is like being with her. Treat me well and faithfully and I will be kind to you."

"You must not say that," Heart's Delight said. "Comparing me with her is like comparing Earth with Heaven. But my husband is dead, and, if you do not hate a creature so ugly as I am, look at me sometimes and I shall be more than content."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked how old she was.

"My animal is the Hare, and I am thirty-one."

"You are a year younger than I am," he said. He was delighted to find that not only did she talk sensibly, but she was no mean performer on the bed. Next morning she waited upon him hand and foot, put on his shoes and socks, and helped him to dress his hair. The two maids, Welcome Spring and Hibiscus, could not get near him. Heart's Delight asked him to give her some white silk to make a mourning gown

for her dead mistress. Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent a boy to the shop to get three rolls of white silk so that both she and the maids might have white gowns. He gave them money and clothes and ornaments and the Moon Lady knew nothing about it.

But Golden Lotus knew, and she went to see the Moon Lady. "You really must speak to him," she said. "The shameless fellow went and slept with that woman yesterday. The wretch might be starved. He is ready to carry on with anybody he can get. We can't let him go on like this. What shall we do if she has a baby? She would play the same game as Lai Wang's wife did. We ought not to allow her such liberties."

"You always try to get me to do things of this sort," the Moon Lady said. "He is carrying on with this woman. You all want to keep in his good graces and let me bear the brunt. Why should I be such a fool? You tell me to talk to him about it. Well, I'm not going to do anything of the sort."

Golden Lotus went back to her room without another word.

The snow had stopped and Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Tai An to set out with the letter for Ch'ien. When he returned from the office, P'ing An told him that Chai's messenger had come for his answer. Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave it to him and asked why he had not come the day before. The messenger told him that he had been delayed because he had had to go to Governor Hou. He took Hsi-mên's letter and went away.

When he had had his dinner, Hsi-mên went to the shop and watched his men weighing out silver and packing up. On the twenty-fourth, they burned paper offerings and started for the south. Han Tao-kuo and Ts'ui Pên took with them the two boys Jung Hai and Hu Hsiu. Hsi-mên gave them a letter and some presents for Miao Hsiao-hu.

By the twenty-sixth, Hsi-mên had finished paying his visits of thanks to relatives and friends. One morning he was sitting in the Moon Lady's room, having his breakfast. His wife said to him: "The first day of next month is Chang-chieh's birthday. We ought to send some sort of present to the Ch'iaos. The proverb says: 'Once a relative, always a relative,' and we ought not to cease these courtesies now that our baby is dead."

"I see no reason why we should," Hsi-mên said. He told

Lai Hsing to buy enough presents to fill four boxes, silken clothes, two kerchiefs and a box of ornaments. Then he wrote a card and told Wang Ching to take the things to Master Ch'iao's house. After this he went to his study in the garden.

Tai An came back. "His Lordship Ch'ien," he said, "received your letter. He wrote a letter to Captain Li and gave it to the officer with whom Huang IV's son-in-law went to Tung-ch'ang Fu. Captain Li asked the magistrate T'ung to send the prisoners and all the documents to him, so that he could go into the case himself. Old Sun was discharged and all that happened was that they had to give ten taels of silver to pay for the other man's funeral expenses. Sun Wên was sentenced for some trivial offence, given seventy stripes, and made to pay a small fine. The officer came back to tell his Lordship Ch'ien and now we have Captain Li's letter."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was very pleased with Tai An for handling the matter so adroitly. He opened the letter and read it. It was from Li to Ch'ien and explained the situation.

I have received your letter [it read] and the matter is now quite clear. Fêng II beat his son and, when his son fought with Sun Wên, both parties received injuries. The man's death took place after the statutory limit. It would be unjust to condemn the other man to death, and I have adjudged that he shall pay Fêng ten taels of silver towards the funeral expenses. So there is an end to the case.

The letter was signed Li Chi-yüan.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked where Sun Wên was now.

"He went home as soon as he came out of prison," Tai An said. "To-morrow he is coming with Huang IV to kotow to you. Huang gave me a tael of silver."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the boy to spend the money on shoes and socks and anything else he needed; Tai An made a reverence to his master and went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing lay down on the bed and went to sleep. Wang Ching burned some incense in a small burner and went out quietly.

Suddenly, Hsi-mên Ch'ing heard someone pushing aside the lattice. The Lady of the Vase came in. She was wearing a violet coat and a white silk skirt. Her hair was disordered and her face very pale. She came forward and, standing beside

the bed, said to him: "Brother, you are sleeping here. I have come to see you. You know I was accused by that fellow and I have been in prison. I still suffer from an issue of blood and I have suffered greatly, for I have been unable to escape from the unpleasantness. The other day you were kind enough to pray for mercy for me and my sentence was reduced by three parts. Still that fellow insists that I must be punished severely. He demanded your arrest. I have come to warn you lest, sooner or later, you should fall into his hands. Now I am going to find a place for myself. Take care of yourself. Do not go to too many parties, and, when you go, come back early. Remember what I say." She threw her arms round him and sobbed.

"Sister," Hsi-mên Ch'ing cried, "tell me where you are going." But she pulled her hands away from him. He woke up and found it was a dream. And, when he woke, his eyes were filled with tears. From the shadow of the blind upon the floor, he knew that it was about noon. He was very sad.

The snow has settled

Its brightness shines upon the window.

The fire is nearly out and the bed is cold.

They meet again in a dream of love

And the breeze sends the fragrance of plum blossom

Through the curtains.

That morning they had sent presents to the Ch'iaos. Now Mistress Ch'iao sent Ch'iao T'ung with an invitation to the Moon Lady and the other ladies. The Moon Lady was told that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was asleep in his study so she did not wish to disturb him. She entertained Ch'iao T'ung in the inner court. But Golden Lotus said: "Give me the card. I will go and see what he says." She came to the study and found Hsi-mên lying on the bed. She sat down on the bed. "My son," she said, "you are talking to yourself. What is the matter with you? No wonder nobody ever sees you nowadays. You are too comfortable here."

As she talked, she looked more closely at him and saw that he had been crying. "What makes your eyes so red?" she said.

"Perhaps because I fell off the pillow," Hsi-mên said.

"No, you have been crying."

"You silly slave," Hsi-mên said. "Why should I cry?"

"You have been thinking of someone who is still dear to you."

"Don't talk nonsense about people dear to me or not dear to me," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"You were thinking about the Lady of the Vase," Golden Lotus said. "And the nurse, Heart's Delight, is in your mind too. As for us, we find no place there. We don't count at all."

"Don't be so silly, you little strumpet," Hsi-mên said. "I want to ask you something. That day when the Sixth Lady was put into her coffin, what clothes did you wear?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"No particular reason," said Hsi-mên, "I just wish to know."

"There must be some reason," Golden Lotus said. "Well, I wore silk, a white silk coat and a yellow silk skirt. And underneath, I wore a purple jacket, a white skirt and red vests." Hsi-mên Ch'ing nodded. "I have been an animal's doctor for twenty years," Golden Lotus continued, "but what is the matter with your donkey's stomach, I can't for the life of me make out. If you are not thinking about the Lady of the Vase, of whom are you thinking?"

"I have seen her in a dream," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Yes," Golden Lotus said, "that's just what you would do. When my nose tickles, it is a sign that I am going to sneeze. Now, even though she is dead, you still think of her warmly. It is a clear sign that you care nothing for the rest of us. When we die, nobody will bother about us."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing put his arms round her and kissed her. "Little oily mouth," he said, "you always think of something nasty to say."

"My son," Golden Lotus said, "I can see through you as clearly as I can see a cat with a black tail."

Their tongues met, and soon the sweetness softened their hearts. There was fragrance upon her lips, and the room in which they were was exquisitely perfumed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was stirred. He kissed her. Then, lying on the bed, mentulam produxit et rogavit ut colluderet. Illa capite submisso labris fovit. She was wearing a gold tiger-headed pin; there were many pearls and plum flowers in her hair, and jewels and ornaments of all kinds on her head.

Suddenly, as they were sporting very pleasantly together, they heard Lai An's voice saying that Ying Po-chüeh had

come. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him to bring Po-chüeh in, but Golden Lotus, greatly excited, cursed Lai An. "Don't let him come until I am up," she cried.

"He is already in the courtyard," Lai An said. "Then tell him to keep out of the way."

Lai An went to Ying Po-chüeh. "Please wait outside a moment," he said. "There is someone in the study." Po-chüeh went towards the pine hedges and looked at the bamboos, some of which were still covered with snow. Wang Ching pulled aside the lattice, and there was a rustle of skirts as Golden Lotus ran away like a wisp of mist.

Po-chüeh came in and made a reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then he sat down.

"It is several days since you were here," Hsi-mên said. "Why is that?"

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "I am absolutely tired of life."

"Why?" Hsi-mên asked.

"Lately," said Po-chüeh, "I have been hard pressed for money, and, yesterday, without the slightest excuse, Ch'un Hua went and had a baby. It would not have been so bad if it had been in the day-time, but it was in the middle of the night. She was in a bad way and I had to jump out of bed, get ready papers and bed-clothes, and go out for the midwife. Ying Pao had gone with my brother to get some fodder, and there was I, as busy as could be, and not a soul to help me. I got a lantern and went down the street for old woman Fêng. When she got there, the baby was born."

"A boy or a girl?" Hsi-mên asked.

"A boy," Ying Po-chüeh said.

"Well, you silly fellow, are you sorry to have a son? So that slave Ch'un Hua has presented you with a son."

"Aunt Ch'un to you," said Po-chüeh, laughing.

"Why did you marry her, you dog, if it is too much trouble for you to go for the midwife?"

"You don't seem to understand," Po-chüeh said. "I am not like you, and, in this cold weather, I know it only too well. You are a rich man and a person of importance. When one of your ladies has a baby, it is as though fresh flowers were added to a piece of embroidered satin. Of course you are pleased. But poor people like us can't even bear the sight of our own

shadows. What point is there in adding to our number? Each member of the household has to be fed and clothed. No! I feel as hard as hard can be. There's Ying Pao goes out to work every day. My brother never gives a thought to me. My eldest daughter has gone and got married, and now, Heaven be my witness! the second one is all ready to be. She will be thirteen years old at the end of this year. The other day some old woman came to ask about her. I said: 'There is no hurry. She is young enough yet. Don't worry me any more.' Then, if you please, this disgusting creature must choose to be born in the middle of the night. Heaven and earth seem dark to me. Where am I to turn for money? My wife saw me worrying, gave the old woman a silver pin, and sent her off. To-morrow will be the baby's third day. A host of people know this and they are sure to come. And what about the ceremony when the child is a month old? When that day comes, the best thing I can do is to disappear and spend a few days at a temple."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "If you do go," he said, "one of the priests will come and take your place in the bed. You seem to have some sense, you dog." He laughed again, but Po-chüeh looked sulky and would not speak.

"Cheer up, my son," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "How much money do you need? You have only to say and you shall have it."

"Not very much," Po-chüeh said.

"You must have enough to cover the expenses, or you will have to pawn your clothes again."

"Since you are so kind, Brother," Po-chüeh said, "I think twenty taels will be sufficient. I did, in fact, write out a note, but I was ashamed to mention the matter, for I have troubled you so many times. I did not fill in the amount. Give me what you think fit, Brother."

"What are you talking about?" Hsi-mên said. "We are friends, and I don't require any note from you."

As they were talking, Lai An came in with tea. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him to put down the cups and go for Wang Ching. When Wang Ching came, Hsi-mên said to him: "Go to the inner court, and tell your mistress that, in the cupboard behind the bed, there are two packets of silver that came to me from his Excellency Sung. Ask her to give you one of them."

The boy went away. He was soon back with the silver.

"Here are fifty taels," Hsi-mên said, handing the packet to Ying Po-chüeh. "Take them. I haven't opened the packet. You'd better open it yourself and see what is in it."

"But this is too much," Po-chüeh said.

"You say your second daughter is growing up," said Hsi-mên; "buy her some new clothes, and, later on, she will be glad of them."

"That is a good idea, Brother," Po-chüeh said. He opened the packet. It was some of the silver which the officers had sent, divided into pieces of three taels each, of very fine quality. He was delighted and bowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "Brother," he said, "how generous you are. No one else would help me as you do. But you will take this note, won't you?"

"You foolish lad," Hsi-mên said, "why should I trouble about that? This is your parents' house or you would not come here to ask help so often. The baby does not belong only to you, he belongs to me too. It is my duty to help you rear him. When the ceremony of the first month is over, I will send for your wife. She will do for the interest on the money I have just given you."

"These last few days," Po-chüeh said, "your aunt has been as thin as your mother."

They laughed and joked together. Then Po-chüeh asked what had happened to Huang's relations.

"Ch'ien wrote to Li," Hsi-mên told him, "and Li sent for the accused and examined them himself. Both Sun Wên and his father were set free, with only ten taels to pay towards the funeral expenses."

"What luck for them!" Po-chüeh exclaimed. "They would never find anybody else like you. No, not even if they took a lantern to look. And you wouldn't take anything from them, either dry or wet. But though you would not accept a present from them, you must take the money you had to spend on Ch'ien. And don't forget to tell Huang he must give us a feast. If you won't tell him, I will. We have saved his brother-in-law's life, and that is no small matter."

The Moon Lady was sitting in her room when Tower of Jade came. "My brother, Mêng Jui, will soon be leaving for

Ssü-ch'uan and Kuang-tung," Tower of Jade said. "He is going to buy stock. He has come to say good-bye and would like to see his Lordship. My brother is in my room. I don't know where his Lordship is. Will you send a boy for him?"

"He is with Ying II, in the garden," the Moon Lady said. "But, talking about asking him to come, Golden Lotus went to speak to him about the invitation Mistress Ch'iao sent us. Ch'iao T'ung was here, waiting for the answer. I gave him tea, and we waited and waited, but she never came back. Ch'iao T'ung lost patience and went off. A long time afterwards, I saw her and asked her if she had spoken to him about it. It was hard to get an answer out of her, but at last she said she had forgotten all about it. The card was still in her sleeve. She is like a donkey that has lost its tail. I don't know what she was doing with him, but she was there a very long time. She would tell me nothing and I gave her a scolding. Then she went away."

After a while, Lai An came in. The Moon Lady said to him: "Go and tell your father Uncle Mêng is here."

When he heard this, Hsi-mên Ch'ing got up. He asked Po-chüeh not to go away, saying he would be back in a moment. Then he went to the inner court. The Moon Lady told him about the invitation.

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but you must go alone. We are still in mourning and it would not look well for a crowd to go."

The Moon Lady told him that Mêng Jui was waiting to see him in Tower of Jade's room. "He has come to say good-bye before he sets out to Ssü-ch'uan and Kuang-tung," she said. She asked why he had sent for the silver.

"Last night Brother Ying's wife had a baby," Hsi-mên said. "He needs some money. And he says that his second daughter is coming to a marriageable age. He is anxious about it."

"Brother Ying is getting on in years," the Moon Lady said. "Now that he has this child, his wife will be pleased. We must send her some rice to make gruel."

"Yes, indeed," Hsi-mên said, "and we will ask Beggar Ying to send us an invitation to the ceremony of the first month. Then we shall see what Ch'un Hua looks like."

"I don't suppose she's any different from any other woman," the Moon Lady said, laughing. "She has eyes and a nose, just like everybody else."

They sent Lai An to ask Mêng Jui to come. Tower of Jade came with her brother. When they had greeted one another and talked for a while, Hsi-mên Ch'ing took Uncle Mêng to the study where Ying Po-chüeh was. He told the boys to bring something to eat. The table was set and they sat down to drink. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told them to set an extra cover and sent Lai An for Master Wên. But the boy came back and said the scholar had gone to call on Scholar Ni. Then Hsi-mên said: "Go and fetch your brother-in-law." After a little while, Ch'ên Ching-chi came. He greeted Mêng Jui and sat down on the other side of the table.

"When are you starting?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Mêng Jui, "and how long do you expect to be away?"

"I am leaving on the second of next month," Mêng Jui said, "but how long I shall be away I cannot tell. I am going to Ching-chou to buy paper, then to Ssü-ch'uan and Kuang-tung for incense and wax. That will take me a year or two. When I have finished buying, I shall come back. I propose to go through Ho-nan and Shên-hsi by land but, when I come back, I shall come by water. That means taking the river to Ching-chou. I suppose, all together, it will be a journey of seven or eight thousand *li*."

Po-chüeh asked how old he was. "I am twenty-six," the young man told him.

"You are a young man," Po-chüeh said, "but you seem to know all there is to know about travelling and business. I myself have wasted my life at home."

More food was brought. Plates and dishes filled up the whole table. It was evening when Mêng Jui went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the gate and returned to Po-chüeh. He happened to see two paper chests and told Ching-chi to fill them up. He asked the Moon Lady to get some of the clothes that had belonged to the Lady of the Vase and put them into the chests with some paper money. He said to Ying Po-chüeh: "It is forty-two days now since she died. We haven't sent for any priests but we are going to burn these chests."

"How quickly time passes," Po-chüeh said. "It is more than a month since my sister-in-law died."

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "the fifth of next month will be her last week's mind, and I must ask some priests to come and hold a service for her."

"This time, you ought to have the Buddhist priests," Po-chüeh said.

"My wife tells me," Hsi-mên said, "that when the sixth lady was alive, when her child was born and she suffered from continually flowing blood, she promised that our two nuns and some others should come and read prayers for her."

Po-chüeh saw that it was getting late. "I must go," he said, "and you will have to be burning these papers for my sister-in-law." He bowed low and added: "Brother, you have been very kind to me and I will never forget it."

"Forget it or not," Hsi-mên said, "don't try and make out that you are dreaming. When the time comes for the ceremony of the first month, all my ladies are going to take presents and congratulate you."

"There is no need for them to bring presents," Po-chüeh said. "It will be good enough of them to come to my poor house."

"I tell you what," Hsi-mên said; "you must dress up old Ch'un Hua and fetch her along here for me to see."

"Your aunt tells me that, now she has a son, she won't require your services any more," Po-chüeh said.

"Wait!" Hsi-mên said. "I shall know how to deal with her when I see her."

Po-chüeh laughed and went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the boys to clear away. Then he went to the room of the Lady of the Vase. Ch'ên Ching-chi and Lai An had packed the paper chests. That day, offerings of paper things had been sent from all the neighbouring temples. Hsi-mên Ch'ing watched Welcome Spring prepare the table and offer cakes, food, and soup to the dead lady. Incense was burned and candles lighted. Then he told Hibiscus to bid the ladies come and he, with them, burned paper offerings before the tablet. Ch'ên Ching-chi took out the paper chests and burned them out of doors.

Chapter Sixty-eight

THE PARTY AT MOONBEAM'S HOUSE

So deep is her passion, even when she is old
She cannot restrain it.
The moon, the dew, the mist, the cloud,
In all of them is something to incite her love.
When a real man stands before her
How shall she control her yearning?

They whisper softly, one to the other,
Then love weaves its chains about them.
Even if their bowels were made of iron
They must melt.
It is time to say farewell
The water runs onward, but the flowers are faded.

WHEN Hsi-mên Ch'ing had burned the paper offerings for the Lady of the Vase, he went to spend the night with Golden Lotus. The next day, Ying Po-chüeh sent him a present of lucky noodles. Then Huang IV came with his brother-in-law, Sun Wên-hsiang. They kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and offered a pig, a jar of wine, two roast geese, and two boxes of fruits. Hsi-mên showed great reluctance to accept them, but Huang IV fell on his knees and begged him to do so. "My Lord," he said, "you have saved our lives, and we and all our households feel that we must do something to show our gratitude. We can't think what to do. These are only trifles which you may care to give your servants." After much argument, Hsi-mên Ch'ing agreed to accept the pig and the wine, though only on the understanding that he would send them on to Ch'ien.

"Well," Huang IV said, "it would seem that since I cannot make you accept them, we shall have to take the rest away." Then he said: "When you are at liberty, we should very much like to give a little entertainment to Brother Ying and yourself."

"Oh, you mustn't pay attention to anything he suggests," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "He plays the fool too much. You have been good enough to offer me these presents and there

is no reason why you should go to all the trouble of entertaining me." Huang IV and his brother-in-law thanked him repeatedly and went away.

On the first day of the eleventh month, when Hsi-mên Ch'ing had returned from the office, he set out again to take wine with Magistrate Li. The Moon Lady, dressed in white, went alone to the Ch'iaos' to celebrate the birthday of Ch'ang-chieh. The same afternoon, Nun Hsüeh came with two boxes of presents. She had heard that the Moon Lady wished to have a service on the fifth, and she slipped out quietly, without any of the other nuns knowing what she was about. As the Moon Lady was not at home, Picture of Grace and Tower of Jade took tea with her. "The Great Lady," they said, "has gone to a birthday party at the Ch'iaos', but you must not go away, for she has something to say to you." The nun stayed.

Golden Lotus had not forgotten what Flute of Jade had told her. She had said that the Moon Lady had conceived after taking some medicine which the nuns had brought her. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had taken a fancy to the nurse, Heart's Delight, and Golden Lotus feared that the nurse might have a child, and win Hsi-mên's favour for herself. So, secretly, she invited Nun Hsüeh to go to her room, and gave her a tael of silver to get some medicine for her.

In the evening the Moon Lady returned and invited Hsüeh to stay. The next day she asked Hsi-mên Ch'ing to give the nun five taels of silver. Hsüeh, ignoring her sister in religion, Wang, arranged with eight other nuns to come to Hsi-mên's house on the morning of the fifth. An altar was set up in the garden-house. There they recited Dhāranis from the Avatamsaka and Diamond Sūtras and fulfilled the ceremonies of the Blood Vessel Sūtra. In the evening there was the ceremony of feeding the Hungry Ghosts. Aunt Wu, Aunt Hua, Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh and Scholar Wên were invited to eat monastic fare. The nuns chanted their liturgy, but used no musical instruments except the wooden fish and the sounding stone.

With Ying Po-chüeh there came a servant from Huang IV bringing a card of invitation. They were asked to go on the seventh to Moonbeam's house. Hsi-mên looked at the card and smiled. "I cannot go on the seventh," he said, "because

I have an engagement at a birthday party on that day. But I shall be free to-morrow, if that will do. Will anybody else be there?"

"Only Li III and myself," Po-chüeh said, "and four singing-girls who will play selections from the 'Story of the Western Pavilion'."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing gave orders that Huang IV's messenger should be entertained, and then dismissed him. It was settled that the party should be held the following day.

"Huang IV sent out some presents to-day, I believe," Po-chüeh said.

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I didn't want to take anything, but he pressed me so hard that, in the end, I accepted a pig and some wine. I sent them with two rolls of white silk, two rolls of cloth made at the Eastern Capital, and fifty taels of silver to his Excellency Ch'ien."

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "you wouldn't take their money in the first instance, and now you have given these four rolls of material to Ch'ien. It will cost you at least thirty taels, all out of your own pocket. You treat them far too generously. Besides, you saved the lives of both father and son."

At sunset Ying Po-chüeh went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him to come again the next day.

The nuns did not finish their service until the first night-watch. Then they burned paper treasure chests and went away.

Early next morning, Nun Wang, who had found out about the service which had been held the day before, came to complain. Hsüeh, she said, had taken everything for herself, and she wanted her fee. The Moon Lady was surprised. "Why didn't you come yesterday?" she said. "I understood from Nun Hsüeh that you had gone to a birthday party at Wang's place."

"That old whore Hsüeh played a dirty trick on me," Nun Wang said. "She told me that the service was put off until to-day. Surely she hasn't taken all the money and not left me a penny?"

"I'm afraid you are too late," the Moon Lady said. "She had the money before the service, so that is all over and done with. But perhaps I can find a roll of cloth for you." She told Tiny Jade to give the nun a meal and to get the cloth for her.

Wang cursed and cursed. "The wicked old whore!" she cried. "She got the poor dead lady to have some scriptures printed and made a lot of money. She promised to share it with me, but every halfpenny of it went into her own pocket."

"That may be," said the Moon Lady, "but she told me that you had five taels for chanting texts to free the poor lady from her blood trouble. Why didn't you do it?"

"On the thirty-fifth day after the lady died," the nun said, "I and a number of other nuns kept chanting those texts for hour after hour in our temple."

"Why didn't you tell me so before?" the Moon Lady said. "I might have given you something for your pains."

Nun Wang said no more. She sat down, but could not keep still and, before very long, she went away to find Nun Hsüeh and tell her exactly what she thought about her.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing came home from the office. He had hardly finished his meal when Ying Po-chüeh arrived. Po-chüeh was wearing a new silk hat, a gown the colour of incense, and black boots with white soles. "It is past noon already," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, "and time we were off. Huang has sent several times to summon us."

"We will take Master Wên with us," Hsi-mên said. He told Wang Ching to go and summon the scholar, but, when the boy came back, he said Master Wên was not at home. He had gone to visit a friend.

"Don't let us wait for him," Po-chüeh said. "These scholars are always running about visiting their friends. There is no telling when he will be back. We mustn't waste time."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'in T'ung to bring the yellow horse for Ying Po-chüeh. "No," said Po-chüeh. "None of your horses for me! When I go riding I wobble about like the clapper of a bell. I'll go first and you can come in a sedan-chair at your leisure."

"Well, well," Hsi-mên said, "do as you please."

Po-chüeh went away and Hsi-mên Ch'ing called for his sedan-chair. He ordered Ch'in T'ung, Tai An and four soldiers to attend him. Just as he was about to set out P'ing An hurried in with a card. "The honourable gentleman from the Office of Works is on his way to see you," he said. "This is his card. His sedan-chair will be here in a moment."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing ordered food to be prepared, and sent Lai Hsing out to buy some special delicacies. An arrived, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing, wearing his ceremonial robes, went to meet him. An was wearing an embroidered ceremonial gown with a round collar, and a girdle with carved gold buckle. They sat down and the servants brought tea. The two men talked politely to one another.

"Sir," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "it was a great disappointment to me that I could not come in person to congratulate you upon your appointment. The other day you were good enough to write to me and send me presents on the occasion of my bereavement. I am very sorry indeed that I have not had any opportunity to show my appreciation of your kindness."

"I cannot say how much I regret that I could not come to the funeral," An said. "When I was at the Capital, I told the sad news to Chai Yün-fêng. Possibly he sent something to mark the occasion?"

"He did indeed," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Even all that long way."

"I imagine that promotion is in store for you this year," An said.

"I am so unlettered and incompetent that I dare not hope for anything," Hsi-mên said. "You, Sir, have been promoted, and at last you have an opportunity to display your talents. The splendid work you have done upon the river is well known."

"You flatter me," said An. "I am but a poor scholar, and, had it not been for his Eminence's kindness, I should never have been given that appointment. You can imagine what terribly hard work it has been in these days when people are so desperately poor. Then, a little while ago, his Majesty required marble. A great many of the bridges over the river had to be pulled down so that the boats could pass under them, and everywhere the Imperial vessels passed, officials and people had a very bad time. Again, the country is overrun by thieves and bandits, and things are at such a pass that even the most efficient administrator would find it impossible to do anything very much."

"Sir," said Hsi-mên Ch'ing, "a man of your undoubted gifts will certainly make short work of difficulties and obtain

still further promotion. Does his Majesty's decree specify any particular time limit?"

"The work must be completed within three years," An said, "and the Emperor is going to appoint an envoy to make sacrifice to the God of the River."

While they were talking, Hsi-mên Ch'ing had ordered a table to be prepared, but An said: "It is very kind of you, but I am on my way to see Huang T'ai-yü."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing said: "You must stay long enough to take some light refreshment." A great number of delightful dainties were brought in and wine was poured into golden cups. Meanwhile, An's attendants were entertained elsewhere. An drank three cups of wine and got up to go, promising to come again. Hsi-mên Ch'ing escorted him to the gate; he got into his sedan-chair and was carried away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the hall, took off his robes of ceremony, and put on a plain hat and a purple gown. He asked if Scholar Wên had returned. Tai An said: "No, but Chêng Ch'un and Huang's boy, Lai Ting-êrh, have come for you. They have been waiting a long time." Hsi-mên Ch'ing went out, got into his sedan-chair, and set off with his attendants for Moonbeam's house.

When he arrived, the people of the house withdrew respectfully, one servant stood on either side of the door. Chêng Ch'un and Lai Ting-êrh went in to announce his coming. Ying Po-chüeh was playing double-sixes with Li III, but, when they heard that Hsi-mên Ch'ing had come, they put aside their game. Moonbeam and her sister Exquisite wore seal-skin caps upon their hair, which was dressed in the style of Hang-chou. They looked as dainty as flowers. They both came out to welcome Hsi-mên Ch'ing and he got out of his sedan-chair and went with them to the guest-room. He had given orders that there should be no music upon his arrival, so the musicians did not play.

Li III and Huang IV were the first to make reverence to him. Then came the old procuress, and lastly the two sisters. Two large chairs had been set in the place of honour and Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ying Po-chüeh sat down in them. Li, Huang, and the two girls sat opposite. When Tai An asked if the sedan-chair should be dismissed, Hsi-mên said that the

soldiers and the chair-men might go away. He sent Ch'in Tung to see whether Master Wên had come home yet, saying that he was to be given the yellow horse to bring him more quickly.

Po-chüeh asked what had kept Hsi-mên so long. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him about An's unexpected visit. Chêng Ch'un brought tea. Exquisite took a cup and offered it to Ying Po-chüeh and Moonbeam offered one to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Po-chüeh held out his hand for this one too. Then he said "Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought it was meant for me."

"I would not pay you so much honour," said Moonbeam.

"You never bother about anybody but this naughty husband of yours," Po-chüeh said. "You ought to treat his friends as well as you treat him."

"I don't consider you are one of his friends," Moonbeam said, laughing.

After tea, the four players kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and he asked their names. "When it is time for them to play," he said, "please tell them to use their drums only, no other instruments."

"Just as you wish," Huang IV replied.

Thinking that Hsi-mên might feel cold, the old procuress told Chêng Ch'un to pull down the blinds and put more coal upon the fire. Some of the band of ne'er-do-wells heard that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was at a party at Moonbeam's house. They came to the door and poked their noses round the corner, but did not dare to go any farther. One of them, who knew Tai An, asked the boy to speak to his master on their behalf. Tai An went softly and told Hsi-mên Ch'ing, but the only response was a growl, and the men went off as fast as their legs would carry them.

Two tables were laid in the place of honour, one for Hsi-mên Ch'ing by himself, the other for Ying Po-chüeh and Master Wên. The scholar had not yet come, but a place was left for him. Two other tables were set opposite, one for Li and Huang, the other for Moonbeam and Exquisite. An excellent meal was served and the tables were decorated with flowers in golden vases. Chêng Ch'un and Chêng Fêng sang.

The party had just settled down when Scholar Wên arrived.

He was wearing a tall hat, and a green gown. When he came in he bowed to the company. "What makes you so late, Scholar?" Po-chüeh said. "We have been waiting for you a long time."

"I am very sorry," Scholar Wên said, "I did not know you wanted me. I have been to see a poor old schoolfellow of mine. We talked about books and that made me late."

Huang IV hastened to set a cup and chop-sticks at Wên's place and the scholar sat down with Ying Po-chüeh. Fresh dishes were brought for him. The two boys sang again. Afterwards the four singers began to play one of the acts of the Story of the Western Pavilion.

Then Tai An came and said that Silver Maid had sent Wu Hui and another boy with some tea.

Moonbeam's house and that of Silver Maid were in the same lane, only a short distance from one another. Silver Maid heard that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was taking wine at Moonbeam's, and decided to send him some tea. Hsi-mên called for the boys. They came and kotowed. They told him their errand, then opened their tea-baskets and each of them offered a cup of fragrant tea with melon-seeds.

"What is Silver Maid doing to-day?" Hsi-mên asked them.

"She is at home," the boy said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing drank the tea and gave each of the boys three ch'ien of silver. Then he told Tai An and Wu Hui to go and fetch Silver Maid.

Moonbeam was quick-witted enough to send Chêng Ch'un with them. "You go too," she told him, "and if she shows any signs of not wanting to come, tell her I shan't love her any more."

"It makes me laugh," Ying Po-chüeh said, "to think of you as partners in your particular trade."

"My good friend," Master Wên said, "you don't seem to understand. It is well known that people of the same profession and the same disposition are fondest of one another. He who finds he has more to hope from Heaven looks always Heavenward, and he whose help comes from the Earth, looks towards the Earth. It is perfectly natural that this young lady should invite another young lady to come and join her."

"Beggar Ying," said Moonbeam, "you and Chêng Ch'un

are just as much partners. You both are always to be found wherever there is anything to be had for the asking."

"My poor foolish child," Po-chüeh said, "I was a rascal long before you were born. I was making love to your mother while you were still in her belly."

They laughed and joked till the players returned to play another act. Hsi-mên Ch'ing called the girl who played the part of Ying Ying and asked who she was. "Don't you recognise her, Father?" Moonbeam said. "She is a niece of Golden Bracelet and her name is Joy-Bringer. She is thirteen years old."

"She will turn out very well," Hsi-mên said. "Even now, she has a most fascinating manner and she sings delightfully." He bade her serve wine to them. Huang IV pressed everybody to eat and made himself most agreeable.

After a while, Silver Maid came. Upon her head was a white head-dress with a band of pearls round it. She wore a white double-breasted silk coat with an embroidered hem. Beneath it, a light green silk skirt with a golden fringe. Her shoes were made of dark green silk. She smiled as she came and kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. She made a reverence to the others. "You make me wild the very moment you come in," Ying Po-chüeh said. "Am I the son of a concubine that you kotow to his Lordship and only make a reverence to the rest of us? Really, you little strumpets give yourselves too many airs. If ever I am called upon to go to the court I shan't forget this."

"Beggar Ying," Moonbeam shouted at him, "you are nothing but an unmannerly scamp. In your slovenly rags how can you expect to be taken for anyone of consequence?"

Once again the tables were set. Silver Maid sat down beside Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He noticed that she was wearing a white head-dress and asked her for whom she was wearing mourning.

"Why, you must know," Silver Maid said, "it is for the Sixth Lady, of course."

This pleased Hsi-mên Ch'ing and they talked together very fondly. Food was brought and Moonbeam came to offer wine to Hsi-mên. Silver Maid rose. "I must go and see my Aunt Chêng," she said. She went to the old procuress's room and made reverence to her. The old woman invited her to sit down

and told a maid to bring a brazier for she was afraid the girl might feel cold. After a while, Silver Maid went back to the others. Fresh courses were brought, but she took no more than a mouthful or two of soup and a piece of cake. Then she put down her chop-sticks. "I understand you had a special service for my lady's last week's mind," she said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"Yes," he said, "I must thank you for sending the tea."

"It was very poor tea I sent," Silver Maid said, "yet you thank me even for that. Rather should I thank you for the splendid presents you sent in return. They set my mother all in a flutter. I suggested to Moonbeam and Cassia that they should send tea to you for my lady's last week's mind, but we did not know you were having any service."

"There were only a few nuns to chant a dirge," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "We did not invite any of our relatives and friends. I was over-tired."

They drank their wine and talked. Silver Maid asked after Hsi-mên's ladies. He told her they were all well.

"Father," Silver Maid said. "My lady died so suddenly, you must feel lonely when you go to her room. Do you still think about her?"

"Indeed I do," Hsi-mên said. "The other day I was in my study, and, though it was broad daylight, I dreamed of her and found myself sobbing."

"I can quite understand," Silver Maid said. "You see, she died so suddenly."

"Now then!" Ying Po-chüeh cried. "You two are talking about your loves while the rest of us are as dry as dry can be. If somebody doesn't come and offer me a cup of wine and sing a song, I shall go."

Li III and Huang IV were greatly put out and hurriedly asked Moonbeam and Exquisite to serve the wine. They sent for the musicians, and the two sisters, with Silver Maid, sat together near the fire and sang: 'Dallying with the Plum Blossoms.' The sound of their voices was enough to break the rocks and make the clouds course more quickly. When they had finished their song Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Po-chüeh: "You made them sing, now you must offer them wine."

"Oh, that's all right," Ying Po-chüeh said. "They shall

have all they want from me before they die. How would they like it? Shall I lie on my back with my limbs outstretched, or on my side, or shall I stand on one leg like a golden cockerel? I can do any of those things. Or perhaps they would like me to imitate a wild horse stampeding round the courtyard, a monkey offering nuts, a yellow dog piddling, or an angel pointing the way? Tell me, Brother, which way shall I deal with them?"

"I can't find words bad enough to curse you with, you dirty scoundrel!" Exquisite cried. "You are always talking nonsense."

Po-chüeh put three cups on a plate. "Daughters," he said, "drink this from my hand. If you don't take it, I'll throw it all over you."

"I am not drinking any wine to-day," Exquisite said.

"Get down on your knees before my sister Exquisite and let me box your ears," Moonbeam said. "Then I'll drink."

"And what do you say, Sister Silver Maid?" Po-chüeh said.

"I am not very well to-day. I will only drink half a cup."

"If you don't go on your knees," Moonbeam said, "you can implore me for a hundred days, but you won't get me to drink any."

"Uncle," Huang IV said, "if you refuse to kneel down, it will show you don't know how to take a joke. Kneel down. I will ask them not to box your ears."

"I won't box his ears more than twice," Moonbeam said, "that is, provided he kneels down."

"Master," Po-chüeh said to Scholar Wên, "you see how these little strumpets carry things to extremes." There was no escape. He knelt down. Moonbeam pulled up her sleeves and held out her slender hands.

"Now, you rascally beggar, will you ever be rude to me again? You must promise out loud, if you wish me to drink the wine." Po-chüeh could not help himself. He promised that he would never be rude to her again. Moonbeam slapped him twice, then drank the wine.

Po-chüeh got up. "Well, most excellent little strumpet," he said, "are you going to drink all the wine and leave none for me?"

"Kneel down again," Moonbeam said, "and I will give you

another cup." She filled one and poured it down Po-chüeh's mouth.

"Oh, you little whore," he cried, "you've spilled it all over my clothes. Let me tell you this is the very first time I've worn this suit. If you make a mess of it I shall have to ask your sweetheart to buy me another one."

They laughed and went back to their places.

It was getting late, and lights were brought. Hsi-mên Ch'ing called for the dice-box. He asked Scholar Wên to throw first, but Wên declined, saying it was not fitting that he should throw before his master. So Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Silver Maid played. They used twelve dice and played: 'Catch the Red.' Meanwhile the four players sang and played. The wine was passed round again. Moonbeam went to Scholar Wên and played dice with him and Ying Po-chüeh, while Exquisite went to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and guessed fingers with him. Then Moonbeam went back to Hsi-mên and played dice again. Silver Maid devoted herself to Li III and Huang IV and offered wine to them.

Moonbeam went to her room and dressed again. She put on a double-breasted coat of figured satin, a skirt of the colour of the finest down, with blue spots and golden fringe. Her trousers were embroidered; her shoes scarlet, designed like a phoenix's bill. Upon her head she wore a small white sealskin cap. In the candlelight she looked more beautiful than ever. The sight of her aroused Hsi-mên Ch'ing's desire. He had drunk deeply, but he remembered what the Lady of the Vase had said to him in his dream: "When you are away from home, never drink too much." He got up and went to the inner court to wash his hands. The old procuress sent a maid with a lantern to light him, and Moonbeam followed him. When he had done what he went to do, she held his hand, and they went together to her room. Moonlight was pouring through the windows and the candles were burning brightly. The air was as warm as Spring, and sweetly perfumed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took off his outer clothes and sat with her upon the bed, his legs intertwined with hers.

"Will you stay the night?" Moonbeam asked.

"No, I must go home," Hsi-mên said. "Silver Maid is here, and that makes me a little uncomfortable. Then I have to

remember my official position. The Inspector is coming this year and I must not run the risk of any scandal. I can only come to you in the day-time." He thanked her for the cakes she had sent. "But when I saw them," he said, "I could not help feeling sad. The Sixth Lady, when she was alive, was the only person who ever made them for me. Now she is dead, there is no one in my house who can do it."

"They are not hard to make, if you are careful about the right proportions," Moonbeam said. "The melon-seeds I sent you, I cracked with my own teeth. But I hear Beggar Ying ate them all."

"He did. The rascal took two handfuls and left me hardly any."

"Lucky for him," Moonbeam said. "I might have sent them specially for him! Thank you very much for the coated plums. My mother took some and found them very good indeed. When she has a coughing fit, she coughs all through the night and upsets everybody in the house. But one of those coated plums in the mouth keeps her throat moist. My sister and I did not take many of them. We gave the jar to my mother because we thought it was good for her to take them morning and night."

"To-morrow, I will send another jar for yourselves," Hsi-mên promised.

"Have you been to see Cassia lately?" the girl asked.

"I have not seen her since the funeral."

"Did she send any tea for the fifth 'week's mind'?"

"Yes, Li Ming brought it for her."

"I will tell you something," Moonbeam said, "if you promise to keep it secret."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked what it was, but Moonbeam thought for a while and then said she would not tell him. "If I do," she said, "it will look as though I talk about the other girls behind their backs."

Hsi-mên put his arms round her. "Little oily mouth, tell me what you were going to say. I won't say a word to anybody."

They were talking when Ying Po-chüeh burst into the room. "Ah, you good people! So you leave us behind and come here to talk secrets to one another?"

"Why do you always poke your nose into other people's business?" Moonbeam said. "How dare you rush in here and frighten me like that?"

"You dog!" Hsi-mên said. "Go back to the front court at once. What do you mean by leaving Master Wên and Silver Maid to come and see what we're about?"

Po-chüeh sat down on the bed. "Let me kiss your arm," he said to Moonbeam, "then I'll go away and leave you to amuse yourselves." He drew the girl's arm from her sleeve and praised it. "My child," he said, "one has only to see these hands of yours to realise that Heaven intended you for the life you lead."

"Oh, you rascal," Moonbeam cried, "no words are bad enough for you."

Po-chüeh took her hand and bit it. She cried out and cursed him. "Oh, vile Beggar Ying, you never stop playing these horrible tricks of yours." Then she said to Peach Blossom her maid: "Go after him and, when he is once outside the door, bolt it."

Then Moonbeam told Hsi-mên Ch'ing all about Cassia and young master Wang. "Sun Kua-tsui," she said, "Pock-marked Chu, Little Chang and some others went with young Master Wang to Cassia's place. He had given up Exquisite and taken on with Iris, at the Ch'in's place. At both places, he has spent a great deal of money and, recently, he had to pawn his fur coat for thirty taels. He stole a pair of his mother's gold bracelets and gave them to Cassia for a month's enjoyment of her favours."

"The wicked little whore!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I told her to have nothing to do with that young scamp. She promised me faithfully she would give him up, and swore she would never see him again. She has deceived me."

"Father, don't be annoyed," Moonbeam said. "I will tell you a way to get even with young master Wang. You will have no more reason to be angry."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took her on his knees. "What is your idea?" he said. "Tell me."

"I will tell you if you promise not to say a word to anybody else, not even Beggar Ying. I don't want it to get about."

"I am not a fool," Hsi-mên said. "Why should I mention it to anyone?"

"Master Wang's mother, Lady Lin, is not yet forty years old," Moonbeam said. "She is a very fascinating woman. She pencils her eyebrows, paints her face, and gets herself up as cleverly as a fox. Her son spends all his time at the bawdy-house and she receives gentlemen at home. She pretends to go to the nunnery, but, as a matter of fact, it is old woman Wên she really goes to see. That old woman arranges everything for her. I understand she is very expert in the arts of love. Now this is what I have to say. If you would like to make her acquaintance, it ought not to be very difficult. Then there is the young man's wife. She is about nineteen years old, and a niece of Grand Marshal Huang of the Eastern Capital. She is as pretty as a picture. She can play backgammon and chess, but she might as well be a widow, for her husband, young Wang, never spends any time with her. She is a very disappointed woman and more than twice has tried to hang herself. Somebody cut her down. If you can only get hold of the mother, you will not have much difficulty in making sure of the daughter."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted with the idea. He put his arms round Moonbeam's neck. "How do you come to know all this, my child?" he said.

Moonbeam often went to Wang's house herself, but she did not think fit to say so to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "One of my friends told me," she said, "and once old woman Wên introduced me to her."

"Who was the man who visited her?" Hsi-mên asked. "Was it Chang II, the nephew of that wealthy Master Chang of the High Street?"

"No," Moonbeam said, "not that ugly fellow. His face is covered with pock-marks, and his eyes are all screwed up. He is not good-looking enough for an adventure of this sort. Nobody but the Chiang girls would take him on."

"Well, I can't guess who the man is," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I will tell you," Moonbeam said. "He is a southerner, the man who made a woman of me. He comes here on business twice a year, but he only stays here one or two nights. He is too fond of poaching."

Hsi-mên was thrilled. "My child," he said, "you seem to be very fond of me, and I am going to give you thirty taels of silver every month. You can give the money to your mother and then it will not be necessary for you to have any other visitors. I will come and see you whenever I am free."

"Why so much as thirty or twenty taels, Father? A few taels for my mother will be enough. I shall be glad not to have to receive everybody who comes, and to belong to you alone."

"Most certainly I shall give you thirty taels," Hsi-mên said. "Say no more about it."

They began to sport upon the bed. It was piled deep with coverlets. "Won't you take off your clothes, Father?" Moonbeam asked.

"I am afraid I must keep my clothes on," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "They will be out of patience waiting for us." He pulled up the pillow for her. She took down her trousers and stretched herself upon her back. Hsi-mên Ch'ing lifted her dainty feet over his shoulders, then unloosed his blue silk trousers and in penem fibulam imposuit. The heart of the flower lay sweetly folded before him; the tender willow-like waist quivered.

This is a flower so delicate
It cannot endure violence.
The wind of spring blows over it unceasingly
And when it reaches the flower's heart
Still seems unsatisfied.
There are no limits to their love.
Softly she calls him her precious boy.
There are no words can tell
The happiness of this night of Spring.

For a long time their love followed its course to their great delight. Hsi-mên Ch'ing breathed heavily, and she made strange little noises without ceasing, her hair spread out over the pillow. "My love," she murmured, "do not be so furious." Then their satisfaction reached its height, semen ex illo quasi rivus defluxit. The rain ceased and the clouds dispersed. They rose, dressed themselves, and washed their hands. Then, hand in hand, they went back to the hall.

Silver Maid, Exquisite, Scholar Wên and Ying Po-chüeh were throwing dice and guessing fingers, all the time encouraging one another to drink, and being very merry together. When Hsi-mên Ch'ing came in, they rose and begged him to sit down. "A nice thing!" Po-chüeh said. "You leave us here all this time and then come to have some wine. To steady your head, I suppose."

"We have been talking," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Talking indeed!" Po-chüeh said. "I know the sort of secrets you have to tell one another." He took a large cup of wine already warmed, and they invited Hsi-mên to drink. The four players sang.

Then Tai An came and said: "The sedan-chair is here." Hsi-mên Ch'ing pursed his lips as a sign that he was ready and Tai An went out to bid the soldiers light their lanterns. As Hsi-mên had made clear his intention not to stay any longer, everyone stood up and drank with him. He ordered the four players to sing: 'When first we met, shyness restrained us.' Then Joy-Bringer took her lute and sang.

When the song was done, Silver Maid offered Hsi-mên Ch'ing a cup of wine while Exquisite and Moonbeam offered wine to Ying Po-chüeh and Scholar Wên. Li and Huang drank too. The four players sang again. When the cup had been emptied, they urged each other to drink again and the wine passed round twice more. The singers sang two more songs, and the wine and the music were finished at the same time.

Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing made ready to go. He told Tai An to give packets of silver, some large, some small, to all who had waited on him. There were three ch'ien of silver for each of the four players, five for the cook, and three for Wu Hui, Chêng Ch'un, and Chêng Fêng. There were two ch'ien for all the other servants, except Moonbeam's maid, Peach Blossom, who was given three. They kotowed to express their thanks. Huang IV did not wish them to accept these presents yet. "Uncle Ying," he said to Po-chüeh, "won't you say something to his Lordship? It is still early, and he must sit down, just to show that he enjoys our entertainment." He turned to Moonbeam. "Sister, you must help me to persuade him to stay."

"I have tried already," Moonbeam said, "but he will not."

"I shall be very busy to-morrow, and I must go," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He bowed to Huang IV. "I have had a very pleasant time," he said.

"Indeed I fear you have been starved," Huang IV said, "and that is why you won't stay. It seems obvious that we have entertained you very poorly."

The three girls kotowed. "When you get home," they said, "please give our humble duty to the Great Lady and the others. When we are free, we will come to see them."

"Yes, do," Hsi-mên said. "Come any time and spend the day."

Lanterns were brought and Hsi-mên Ch'ing went down the steps. Old woman Chêng came to make a reverence to him. "My lord," she said, "why must you go in such a hurry? I fear our cooking cannot have pleased you. There is another course to come yet."

"I have had everything I wanted," Hsi-mên said. "Unfortunately, I have to get up very early in the morning to go and attend to some important business at the office. Brother Ying has nothing to do: ask him to stay."

Ying Po-chüeh was going away with Hsi-mên Ch'ing, but Huang IV stopped him. "If you go too, Uncle," he said, "it will be the last straw."

"Don't keep me," Po-chüeh said. "Try Scholar Wên. If you can persuade him to stay, I shall believe you are a hero."

Scholar Wên tried to slip away, but Huang IV's boy and Lai An caught him by the waist and held him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing reached the gate. He asked Ch'in T'ung whether he had brought anything for Scholar Wên to ride. "There's a donkey here," Ch'in T'ung said. "Hua T'ung is in charge of it."

Hsi-mên called out to Scholar Wên: "There is an animal here for you to ride. You and Brother Ying stay. I must go now." They all went with him to the gate. Moonbeam was holding his hand. She gave it a squeeze.

"Remember what I have told you," she said, "but keep it to yourself." She bade Chêng Ch'un go with Hsi-mên to his house. Hsi-mên got into his sedan-chair and went away.

Outside the gate, Silver Maid said good-bye to everybody, and was going home with Wu Hui when Moonbeam said:

"If you see Cassia, don't say a word about this." Then they went back to their tables; the fire was replenished, and more wine poured out. With music, songs and wine, they passed the time very pleasantly, and the party did not break up until the third night-watch. The entertainment cost Huang IV about ten taels of silver.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing, with two soldiers carrying lanterns, reached home in his sedan-chair, dismissed Chêng Ch'un, and went to bed.

The next day, Magistrate Hsia sent a servant to ask Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go early to the office. There was a thief to be tried. He went, heard the case and did not return until midday. When he had finished dinner, Shên Ting came with a young man named Liu Pao, whom Uncle Shên introduced as a cook for the silk-shop. Hsi-mên Ch'ing agreed to engage him and went to the study to get a return card to give to Shên Ting. There he found Tai An and asked him what time Scholar Wên had come back the night before.

"I was in the shop," Tai An said, "and had been in bed a long time before I heard Ch'in T'ung knocking at the door of the house opposite. I think it must have been the third night-watch. This morning, I asked him if he had been drunk. 'No,' he said, 'but Uncle Ying was, and he was sick all over the floor. Then Moonbeam thought it was getting very late, and she sent Chêng Ch'un home with him.'" This made Hsi-mên Ch'ing laugh. He called the boy closer to him.

"You remember old woman Wên, who arranged my daughter's marriage. If you know where she lives go and tell her I want her to come and see me at the house across the road."

"I don't know where she lives," Tai An said, "but I will ask Brother-in-law."

"Yes, make sure, and then go straight away," Hsi-mên said.

Tai An went to the shop and asked Ch'ên Ching-chi where the old woman lived.

"What do you want with her?" Ching-chi said. "Go along East Street towards the south. Turn to the left when you have passed the bridge. You will find yourself on the Wangs' estate. In the middle of it is a guard-house, and, close by, a

small stone bridge. Cross the bridge and you will come to a lane that passes a nunnery. Go up there and the third house you come to will be a bean-curd shop. A little farther along is a house with red doors. That is the place. Shout: 'Old Mother Wên,' and she will come out to you."

"It sounds like a witch directing a tinker," Tai An said. "What a rigmarole! Tell me again. I shall never remember all that."

Ching-chi told him again.

"A fine walk!" Tai An said. "I must have a horse." He went and got the big white horse, mounted it, whipped it up, and went off at a gallop. He followed all his instructions until he came to the guard-house near the ruined stone bridge, and saw the red walls of the nunnery. He went up the lane until he reached a house with a sign to show that bean-curd was sold there. Outside, was an old woman drying horse dung.

"Does an old woman named Wên live about here?" Tai An asked her.

"Yes," the old woman said. "The next house on the other side."

Tai An went on and came to a house with red doors. He jumped down from his horse and knocked at the door with his whip. "Is Sister Wên at home?"

Wên T'ang, the old woman's son, opened the door and asked Tai An what he wanted.

"I have come from his Lordship Hsi-mên to ask Madam Wên to go and see him at once," Tai An said.

As soon as Wên T'ang heard this, he asked Tai An to go in. The boy tied up his horse and went into the house. Lucky papers were hanging up, and a number of people were engaged in reckoning up the amount of offerings. He waited some time, then a cup of tea was brought to him. "My mother is not at home," Wên T'ang said, "but as soon as she comes back I will tell her, and she will come to see his Lordship to-morrow morning."

"If she is not at home," Tai An said, "what is her donkey doing here?" He stood up and went to the inner court. Old woman Wên was drinking tea with several other old women. She had no time to hide.

"Surely this is Sister Wên," Tai An said. "Why was I told you were not at home?"

The old woman laughed and made a reverence. "Brother," she said, "would you mind going back and telling his Lordship that I have a party? I don't know what he wants, but I will come to see him to-morrow morning."

"I don't know what he wants you for," Tai An said. "I only know he does want you. What an out-of-the-way hole of a place you live in. Getting here has made me quite exhausted."

"For the last few years," old woman Wên said, "when your master has bought any maids or arranged any marriages, he has always gone to Fêng or Hsüeh or Wang. He has ignored me completely. Why does he suddenly want me now? It is as though one saw beans burst before the pan is put on the fire. Perhaps, now that his Sixth Lady is dead, he wishes me to find him another lady to take her place?"

"I know nothing about that," Tai An said. "You will find out when you see him."

"Well, Brother, sit down for a while and, when my guests go away, I'll go with you."

"My master wishes you to go at once," Tai An said. "He told me so repeatedly. He is waiting to talk to you before he goes out."

"Stay until I've given you something to eat, then we'll start together."

"I don't want anything to eat."

Old woman Wên asked if Hsi-mên's daughter had any children. Tai An told her she had not. Then the old woman gave him some cakes and went to change her clothes. "You go first on your horse," she said, "and I'll follow on foot."

"Your donkey is here," Tai An said. "Why don't you ride it?"

"My donkey?" said the old woman. "That donkey belongs to my neighbours of the bean-curd shop. They leave it here to graze, and you think it is mine."

"But you used to have a donkey," the boy said.

"Yes, but some time ago one of my young women hanged herself. I had to sell my old house to pay off her people, so you can hardly expect me to have kept the donkey."

"The house didn't matter very much," Tai An said, "but

I'm surprised you parted with the donkey. I should have thought you would have kept him with you day and night. If I'm not mistaken, that donkey was splendidly finished."

Old woman Wên laughed merrily. "Oh, you young monkey!" she cried, "I'm afraid you'll come to a bad end. I was taking you seriously. Well, it's some years since I saw you last and a fine clever-spoken lad you've become. You'll have to come to me when you think of finding a wife."

"My horse goes at a good pace, and you walk slowly. If you don't come soon, my master will be in a fine temper. Come on, up you get behind me."

"You young rascal," the old woman said, "I'm not your shadow. What do you think people in the street will say if they see me riding behind you?"

"Then hire this donkey. We will pay them when you get there."

"That sounds better," said the old woman. She told her son Wên T'ang to saddle the donkey and put a pair of blinkers on him. Then she climbed on to his back and went with Tai An to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Chapter Sixty-nine

LADY LIN

WHEN Tai An and old woman Wên reached the house, P'ing An told them that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was at the shop across the road. Tai An went to see him. He was in the study with Scholar Wên but, as soon as Tai An came in, he went into another small room.

"Old woman Wên awaits your pleasure," Tai An said to him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing bade the boy bring her in. The old woman raised the lattice quietly and came in. She kotowed to him.

"Sister Wên," Hsi-mên said, "it is a very long time since I saw you last."

"Yes," the old woman said. "I have been very busy."

"Where are you living now?" Hsi-mên asked her.

"Unfortunately," the old woman said, "I had a lawsuit and was compelled to sell my old house. I am living now on the Wangs' estate, at the south end of the street."

"Stand up," Hsi-mên said, "I have something to say to you." The old woman got up, and Hsi-mên sent the boys out. P'ing An and Hua T'ung went to the corner door, but Tai An hid himself behind a curtain to listen.

"You frequently call to see ladies of quality," Hsi-mên said. "Tell me, who are they?"

"The Princely family in the High Street, Major Chou's, Master Ch'iao's, Master Ch'ang's and Magistrate Hsia's. I see them constantly."

"Do you happen to know the lady at General Wang's place?"

"She is one of my most regular patrons. The lady herself and her daughter-in-law are always buying flowers from me."

"If you know them well, I should like you to do something for me," Hsi-mên said. He took up a piece of silver weighing five taels and gave it to her. "If you devise a scheme for getting the lady to your place, so that I can meet her only once, there will be more for you."

Old woman Wên laughed. "Who told you about her?" she said. "How did you come to hear of them?"

"There is a common saying," Hsi-mên answered, "that as rees have their shadows, so people have their names. Why shouldn't I know of them?"

"The Lady is thirty-five years old," old woman Wên said, "and she is all you could desire. She is charming and intelligent, and she looks not a day over thirty. If she does carry on like this occasionally, she does so only in the strictest secrecy. Generally, when she goes out, she is accompanied by a train of servants. She goes wherever she has to go and comes straight back. Her son is now grown up, so, of course, she does not wish people to talk about her. Probably the stories you have heard are untrue. She has, indeed, a great big house and, when her son is not at home, it is possible a gentleman may sometimes come to visit her, but nobody ever hears about it. It would be quite impossible for her to come to my place. There are no conveniences there. Even if you offered me more money I dare not take it. I would rather go and tell her what you have said to me."

"If you will not take my money, it means you will do nothing for me, and I shall be very much offended. Take it, and if this little business comes off, you shall have some silken clothes."

"You are so wealthy that that side of the affair does not trouble me," the old woman said. "I shall consider myself lucky if you so much as look my way." She knelt down and took the money. "I will go and speak to the lady. When I come back I will tell you what she says."

"You must take every pains," Hsi-mên said. "I shall expect you here. I won't send a boy for you."

"Very well," the old woman said. "To-morrow perhaps, or maybe the day after. As soon as I am in a position to say anything, I will come and see you."

She went out. Tai An came up and spoke to her. "Sister Wên," he said, "one tael is all I ask from you. It was I who told you to come, and you mustn't keep everything for yourself."

"You little monkey," old woman Wên said. "When we hear someone sifting grain on the other side of a wall, we have no means of telling whether the results are good or bad. It is just the same with this business." She went out, mounted the donkey, and her son led it away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Scholar Wên chatted together for a while, then Magistrate Hsia came. Hsi-mên put on his hat and robes and went with Hsia to see the Sub-Prefect Lo, whose name was Lo Wan-hsiang. It was late when he returned.

Old woman Wên was very pleased with the five taels she had received from Hsi-mên Ch'ing. In the afternoon when the tea-party at her house was over, she went to call upon Lady Lin. She made a reverence to the lady, who asked why it was so long since she had called. Old woman Wên said she had been having a tea-party and that she had been busy making preparations to go on a pilgrimage in the twelfth month.

"Why not send your son instead?" Lady Lin said.

"If I find I can't go, I shall have to send Wên T'ang," the old woman said.

"When the time comes I will give you some money for him."

The old woman thanked her. Lady Lin invited her to sit near the fire. The maid brought tea.

"Is the young master in?" old woman Wên asked, while she was drinking her tea.

"No," Lady Lin said, "he has not been home for two nights. He is always going with some villain or other to spend his nights in the haunts of vice. He seems to care nothing for his wife, who is an exquisite creature, and I don't know what can be done about it."

"Where is the young mistress?" the old woman said.

"She is in her room," Lady Lin said.

When the old woman was sure they were alone, she said: "I don't think you need worry any longer, Lady. I think I know a way to dispose of these bad companions, and get the young master back to his home, so that he never sets foot in a brothel again. But I dare not suggest it to you without your leave."

"I always listen to any suggestions you make," Lady Lin said. "If you have anything to say, speak out."

"His Lordship Hsi-mên, who lives near the Town Hall," the old woman began, "is now an assistant magistrate and a military officer. He lends money to all the officials, and has four or five shops where he sells silks and medicines, cloth and

thread. He has boats upon the river going up and down for his purchases. He buys salt from Yang-chou and incense and candles from Tung-p'ing Fu. Dozens of clerks are employed in his service. He is a ward of the Imperial Tutor Ts'ai in the Eastern Capital, and a subordinate of Grand Marshal Chu. He and Chai, the Comptroller of the Imperial Tutor's household, are upon a footing of kinship. He is on friendly terms with the highest officers of the Province, not to mention their underlings. He has acre upon acre of property and so much rice that it rots in his barns. His wife, by his second marriage, is a daughter of Captain Wu. He has five or six ladies and scores of singing-boys and dancing-girls. There is continual feasting in his house. He is about thirty-one or thirty-two, in the very prime of life. He is tall and handsome, and he takes medicine to strengthen his weapon. In matters of love, none is more skilled than he. He plays backgammon and chess, and is an expert ball-player. He is well up in the philosophers and every kind of amusement. He profits by everything he sees. Indeed, so clever a man can only be compared to a fine piece of jade or a lump of pure gold.*

"Now, Lady, he has heard that your family has held high rank for generations, and he knows that the young master has been in the military academy. He would very much like to make your acquaintance. Of course, he cannot do that without a preliminary meeting. The other day he was given to understand that your birthday is not far distant. He would like to be allowed to come in a friendly way to celebrate the occasion. He spoke to me about the matter. I said to him: 'I can quite see that you don't feel you can call without an introduction of some sort. Let me go and speak to the lady and ask her leave.' Lady, I don't regard this simply as a question of becoming friendly with him. You will be able to ask him to help you to get rid of the young master's bad companions. I do not think a man of his sort will be in any way damaging to the good fame of your house."

Lady Lin was already persuaded, but she said to the old woman: "We have never met. How can we suddenly pick up an acquaintance?"

"That need not trouble you," the old woman said. "I will go to him and say that you would be glad of his help about an

accusation you propose to send to the courts against these rascals, and that you would be very much obliged if he would come and talk the matter over with you."

Lady Lin was satisfied, and it was arranged that she should expect him two days later, in the evening.

At dinner-time next day, the old woman came to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He was in his study when Tai An came to tell him that she had come. He went to the inner room and pulled down the lattice. The old woman came and kotowed to him. Tai An, who knew well enough what was afoot, went out. Old woman Wên told Hsi-mên she had succeeded in persuading Lady Lin. She had spoken highly of him, she said, explained his position, praised his generosity and amiability, spoken of his gay and lively nature. "She believed what I told her," the old woman said, "and she is willing to meet you to-morrow night. Her son will not be at home. She will offer you a meal and make a show of discussing legal matters with you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted. He told Tai An to get two rolls of fine silk for the old woman.

"When you go to-morrow," the old woman said, "don't be too early. Go at night, when it is quiet in the streets, and enter the house by the back-door. Close to the back-door is a house belonging to a woman called Tuan. I shall be waiting there for you. Knock at the door and I will come out and take you to Lady Lin's house. We shall have to be careful that none of the neighbours see us."

"I understand," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Go to Madam Tuan's and wait there for me. Don't go away. I shall certainly not be late."

Old woman Wên went back to tell Lady Lin the result of her conversation with Hsi-mên.

That night, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to Picture of Grace's room. He was impatient for the next day and was sparing in his attentions. When the day came, he put on a white hat and went with Ying Po-chüeh to Hsieh Hsi-ta's place to celebrate his birthday. Two singing-girls were there. He drank only a few cups of wine and, as soon as it was dark, escaped from the party and mounted his horse. Tai An and Ch'in T'ung followed him. It was the nineteenth day of the month and the moon was full. He set eye-shades on his eyes and turned into

the road which led from the main street to Lady Lin's back-door. It was late, and the street was quiet. Before he came to the door, he pulled up his horse and bade Tai An knock at Madam Tuan's door. This house belonged to Lady Lin. Old woman Wên had introduced Madam Tuan to Lady Lin as a kind of guard for the back-door and, whenever any business of this sort was to be done, the back-door was always the place chosen as the rendezvous.

Old woman Wên heard the knocking and came to the door at once. She waited until Hsi-mên Ch'ing had dismounted and taken off his eye-shades. She told Ch'in T'ung to wait with the horse beneath the eaves of a house close by. Tai An went to wait in Madam Tuan's house. Then the old woman took Hsi-mên through the back-door and fastened it securely behind them. They went through a passage which led to a courtyard. On one side were the five rooms which formed Lady Lin's apartments. The small door which led to them was closed. Old woman Wên knocked softly. The sound was delightful to Hsi-mên's ears. A maid came and opened the door. The old woman took Hsi-mên Ch'ing to the hall. When the screen was pulled aside, he saw that the place was brightly lit up by lamps and candles. In the place of honour was a portrait of Wang Ching-ch'ung, Commander-in-Chief of T'ai-yüan, and Duke of Fên-yang. He wore a red dragon embroidered gown, with a jade girdle, and sat upon a great chair covered with a tiger skin, reading a book upon the art of war. Had his beard been longer, he would have looked like the God of War himself. Above the portrait was an inscription: 'The Hall of Virtue and Righteousness.' There were two scrolls written in the *Li* style, of which one read: 'The Tradition of Integrity in this House stands ever firm as the pine-tree and the bamboo.' The other bore the legend: 'His services to his country were many as the stars and glorious as the mountains.'

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was looking at them when he heard a tinkling of the bells upon the door. Old woman Wên brought him a cup of tea. "Please ask the lady to come and see me," he said.

"Pray, Sir," the old woman said, "drink your tea. I have told her ladyship that you are here."

Lady Lin had hidden herself behind the door and was secretly taking stock of him. She found him tall and good-looking. He was wearing a white silk hat with sable ear-covers, a purple woollen gown, and a pair of black shoes with white soles. She liked the looks of him. She quietly summoned old woman Wên and asked for whom he was wearing the white hat.

"His Sixth Lady died in the ninth month," the old woman said, "but though she is no more, he has still as many ladies as there are fingers on his hand. He is like a quail just let out from his cage, smart at the attack."

Lady Lin was more pleased than ever. Old woman Wên urged her to come and see Hsi-mên, but she said it would embarrass her and she would rather he came to her room. The old woman went back to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and said: "The Lady would like you to go to her." She pulled aside the screen and he went in.

There were red hangings about Lady Lin's room and the floor was covered with carpets and rugs. There was a delightful odour of orchids and perfume, and the atmosphere was as balmy as that of spring. The bed had embroidered curtains. The screens shone like the moon. Lady Lin wore a head-dress of gold thread and jade, a full gown of white silk, and a coat of figured satin, with a gold design upon an incense-coloured background. Her skirt was of the scarlet satin worn by ladies of the court, and her white silk shoes were high-heeled. She was, indeed, an exquisite woman of the embroidered chamber, a goddess who, as it were, made sacrifice of her body for the love of men.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed. "Lady," he said, "will you not sit in the place that is your due, that I may make reverence to you?"

"My lord," she said, "I pray you, do not."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing kotowed to her twice, and she returned his greeting. Then he sat down on a chair and she sat on the edge of a small couch shaped like a comb. She was on the other side from him, but not immediately facing him.

Old woman Wên saw that the door to the courtyard was safely fastened. The servants withdrew. The door which led to young master Wang's apartments was secured. A maid brought tea.

"The lady," old woman Wên said, "has heard of your name and your position as an officer of the law. She would be very glad to know if you are disposed to help her."

"Pray tell me what I can do," Hsi-mên said.

Lady Lin spoke for herself. "In truth," she said, "though we have inherited a title, I have not been well-off since my husband's death. My son was brought up without that discipline which would have been good for him and, even now, he has not passed his examination. He has studied at the military academy, but I fear his education has been neglected. Then, too, he has fallen into the clutches of some very objectionable fellows. They have carried him off to places of ill-fame, and, over and over again, he has brought my family to the verge of ruin. There are times when I think of going to the courts to make accusation against him, but I feel I cannot bring shame upon my dead husband. I have asked you to come, and, since I am telling you the truth, it is the same as though I actually went to the court. I shall esteem it a great favour if you will rid my son of these evil companions and so enable him to make a fresh start. If he will only change his present mood and attend to his studies, he will become a worthy successor to a worthy family. If you can bring this about, I shall be eternally grateful and try to make you a suitable return."

"Most estimable lady," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "please do not speak of reward. For generations your family has been one of exalted rank. Your son is at the military academy now, and, of course, he ought to think of his future and the title that will come down to him. Unfortunately, he has got mixed up with a pack of rascals and is giving himself up to wine and undesirable young women. It is only because he is young. Now that you have issued your commands, I will go to the office and have the rascals punished. You shall have no further trouble."

Lady Lin stood up and made a reverence. "I hope to be allowed to make you a present," she said.

"Please don't mention it," Hsi-mên said. "We are such good friends."

As they talked, they exchanged glances that were more than affectionate. Old woman Wên set the table and put wine upon it. Hsi-mên Ch'ing made a show of reluctance to accept such

an honour. "This is my first visit," he said. "I have come empty-handed. How can I accept such kindness at your hands?"

"Indeed," Lady Lin said, "it is I who should apologise for being taken unawares and having nothing more than this poor wine to offer you. I can only hope that it will serve to keep out the cold."

The maid poured out the wine. Lady Lin rose to offer him a cup. He stood up too and said: "I should be the first to offer wine."

"To-day, perhaps," old woman Wên said, "you may be dispensed from offering wine to her Ladyship. The fifteenth day of the eleventh month is her birthday and, I suppose, you will come to congratulate her."

"Why didn't you tell me so before?" Hsi-mên said. "Why, this is the ninth. There are only six days left. Of course I shall come to pay my respects."

Lady Lin smiled. "You are too kind," she said.

Sixteen bowls of delightful food were brought. Candles in silver candlesticks burnt brightly on the table; a golden brazier on the floor gave forth splendid heat. They offered wine to one another, played games, and guessed fingers. Their smiles and merriment were an omen of clouds and rain, and, as we know, wine never fails to arouse the passions. The water-clock dripped and dripped; the moon cast its beams upon the window. Their minds were obsessed by the same idea. Old woman Wên had withdrawn, and, though they called her several times, she made no answer. Seeing that they were alone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing gradually moved his chair nearer and nearer to her; his words became more and more affectionate. He pressed her hands, touched her arm, drew closer. Then he put his arms about her neck. She smiled but did not repulse him. She opened her red lips and he slipped his tongue into her mouth. They kissed, and smiled still more lovingly.

Lady Lin got up and fastened the door. She took off her long gown and some of her ornaments. Gently, she pulled aside the bed-curtains and spread the embroidered coverlets. The pillows were set at one end of the bed. There was a delightful odour of perfume. Their perfect bodies met in an embrace; he felt the sweetness of her breasts.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing had been warned of the woman's skill in matters of love, and had brought his instruments with him. With the secret drug to encourage him, his passion blazed like fire. Their outstretched limbs quivered with a madness like that of butterflies and bees.

Hsi-mên spent himself to the utmost to satisfy the woman, and they went on till it was very late. Lady Lin's hair was disordered; her pins had fallen out of place. She seemed like a weary flower, a tired willow. They lay down quietly together.

When they were up again and had put on their clothes, Lady Lin snuffed the candles and unlocked the door. She dressed herself before a mirror and told a maid to bring water for them to wash their hands. Again they pressed each other to drink. Hsi-mên Ch'ing drank three cups and got up to leave. Lady Lin could not persuade him to stay. She asked him to visit her again. Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed and promised to come. She went with him as far as the door into the courtyard. Old woman Wên opened the back-door and told Tai An and Ch'in T'ung to bring their master's horse.

The watchman was already beating his rounds from street to street. It was very still and the sky was white with frost. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went home.

The next day, when he had gone through his ordinary business at the office, he summoned two police runners and ordered them to find out who had been going about with Wang III, and the places to which they resorted. "Report to me," he said, "when you have made enquiries." He explained this to his colleague Hsia saying: "Young Wang III appears to be neglecting his studies. Yesterday his mother sent a man to me to say that it is not really his fault, but that he has got into the clutches of a pack of rascals. Unless we make an example of them, I'm afraid they will be the ruin of this scion of a famous house."

"You are right. We will deal with them as they deserve," said Hsia.

The runners, armed with Hsi-mên Ch'ing's order, went round to find out the names and, in the afternoon, they came to his house and made their report. Hsi-mên Ch'ing examined their list. Upon it were the names of Sun Kua-tsui, Chu Shih-nien, Little Chang, Nieh Yüeh, Hsiang III, Yü K'uan

and Mohammedan Pai. The girls were Cassia and Jade Bracelet.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took up a brush and crossed out the names of the two girls and of Sun Kua-tsui and Chu Shih-nien. Then he gave orders that all the others should be arrested and brought before him the following day.

In the evening, the runners discovered Wang III and the others drinking and playing ball at Cassia's house. They surrounded the house, and, in the middle of the night, raided it. They arrested Little Chang, Nieh Yüeh, Yü K'uan, Mohammedan Pai and Hsiang III. Sun Kua-tsui and Chu Shih-nien crawled away to the back of the house, and Wang III crept beneath Cassia's bed. Cassia and the others were terrified and did not know what to do. They came out to ask what the raid meant, but Wang III, in his hiding-place, dared not move an inch. The old procuress imagined that the runners must have come again at the orders of some authority in the Capital. Before dawn, she made Li Ming dress and take Wang III home.

The police took Little Chang and the others and threw them into gaol for the night. The next day, when Hsi-mên Ch'ing arrived at the office, he went with Magistrate Hsia to the hall of audience. The underlings were all in attendance. The prisoners were dragged forward. Each of them was placed in the screws and then beaten twenty times. Their skin was torn, their flesh bruised, and blood streamed from them. There was such a sound of beating that it reached the skies and the noise of their groanings shook the earth.

"You outrageous scoundrels!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing cried. "You are always leading astray young men of good family and taking them to the bawdy-house. I ought to give you most severe punishment, but, for this once, I am being kind to you and letting you off with a few stripes. If ever you come into my hands again, I will have you put in the cangue and make a show of you outside the Town Hall." He bade the officials kick them out, and they ran for their lives.

Having settled this matter, Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Hsia retired to a room to drink tea.

"Yesterday," Hsia said, "I had a letter from my kinsman, Grand Secretary Ts'ui, in which he says that a report upon

our work has reached the capital, but, as yet, its consequences are unknown. I think we might send a man to Huai-ch'ing Fu to see whether any news is to be had from Lin Ts'ang-fêng, our colleague there."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing agreed. They summoned a man and said to him: "Here are five ch'ien of silver. Take them and go to Huai-ch'ing Fu and call upon Captain Lin. Take our cards and find out what you can about the report and when we are going to know what has happened in regard to it." The man took the silver and the cards, went to his room to get his things ready, called for a horse, and started on his journey. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Magistrate Hsia went home.

When Little Chang and his friends escaped from the court, they could not imagine why they had, so unexpectedly, got into trouble. One blamed another but they found it impossible to decide who had given them away.

"I think somebody in the Eastern Capital is responsible," Little Chang said.

"No," said Mohammedan Pai, "if it had been that, we should not have got off so easily."

There is an old saying, 'Goldsmiths are the greatest thieves, and singing-girls can never be outdone in cunning.' So it was with these rascals. They were as artful as could be. Nieh Yüeh hit upon the solution.

"I know what it is," he said; "Hsi-mên Ch'ing is anxious to put young Master Wang in his place. You see, he was playing with Hsi-mên's own girl. When there is a fight between a dragon and a tiger, the little wolves come off badly."

"It sounds likely," Little Chang said, "and we come off the worst. Sun Kua-tsui and Chu Shih-nien were there with us, but we were the only ones who got into trouble."

"Don't be silly!" Yü K'uan said, "you know they are friends of Hsi-mên. If he had arrested them, they would have been on their knees and he would have been sitting there, and it would not have been very pleasant for him."

"Why weren't the girls taken?" Little Chang said.

"He is very fond of both of them," Nieh Yüeh said. "Cassia is his own girl, and he would never think of arresting her. It's no use complaining. Put the blame on our bad luck. It's that

which has brought us to this pass. By the way, I noticed that Magistrate Hsia never spoke a word. That is how I know this is one of Hsi-mên's tricks, and his alone. Let us go to Cassia's house and see what Wang III has to say. We can't have our backs broken for nothing. If we don't get some money out of him, the girls will think we're fools."

They went to Cassia's house. The door was closed as though it were of iron. They knocked for a long time, and, at last, a maid came and asked who was there. She did not open the door.

"We have come to see Master Wang," Little Chang said.

"He is not here," the maid said. "He went home last night. There is nobody here. I can't let you in."

They went to Wang's house and marched into the parlour. Wang III heard that they had come and hid himself in his own room, terrified. After a long delay, he sent a boy to say he was not at home.

"Ah," they cried in chorus, "if he is not at home, where is he? Send for him."

Yü K'uan said: "Look here! It's no use his pretending to be half asleep. We have been haled before the courts, beaten and kicked. Now they want him there." He pulled up his gown and showed the boy his legs. "Go and tell your master that we have been beaten on his account," he roared.

One after the other, they lay down on the benches and groaned and yelled. Wang III was less inclined than ever to come out. He said to his mother: "Mother, you must save me."

"What can I do?" his mother said, "I am only a woman."

The men began to lose patience and demanded that Lady Lin should speak to them. She did not go to them, but spoke from behind a screen.

"Wait a while," she said. "Really, he is not at home. I know, for a fact, that he is at my estate outside the city. I will send for him."

"Do, Lady," Little Chang said, "and please be quick about it. This business must be settled, and the only thing to do with a wart is to cut it. Your son is the cause of this trouble and we have had to bear the brunt of it. We have been dismissed now, but the court has still to deal with him. Until he comes, there will be no end to the trouble."

Lady Lin bade her servants take them some tea. Wang III was as frightened as a ghost. He implored his mother to find someone to get him out of the difficulty. At last, Lady Lin said: "I believe old woman Wên knows his Lordship Hsi-mên. Some years ago she acted as intermediary in his daughter's marriage. She must know him well."

"If she does, send for her," Wang III said.

"But a few days ago," his mother said, "you insulted her and she has not been here since. You offended her. I don't see how I can ask her now, and I don't suppose she would come if I did."

"Good Mother," Wang III said, "this matter is extremely serious. Send for her and I will beg her pardon."

Lady Lin sent Yung Ting, the boy, to fetch the old woman. Yung Ting went quietly out by the back-gate and brought her.

"Old mother Wên," Wang III said, "you know his Lordship Hsi-mên and you must save my life."

The old woman pretended she could do nothing. "I arranged his daughter's wedding some years ago, but I have hardly been to his house since. It is a very big establishment. I can hardly expect to go there very often."

Wang III knelt down. "Old mother Wên," he said, "if you will only help me, I will see you do not lose by it. I will remember your kindness as long as I live. These fellows are trying to get me to go to the court and I don't want to go."

Old woman Wên looked at Lady Lin. "Yes," the young man's mother said, "help him if you can."

"I am not going alone," the old woman said. "Put on your hat and clothes, Sir. I will take you to see his Lordship, and you can settle the business for yourself. I will say what I can on your behalf and, doubtless, everything will soon be all right."

"These fellows are very anxious to find me," Wang III said. "I am afraid they will see us as we go out."

"Don't worry about that," old woman Wên said. "I will go and pacify them. I'll arrange for them to have something to eat and drink and, while they are eating, I'll get you out by the back-door. They won't see us."

She went to the outer hall and made a reverence to Little Chang and the others. "I have come on behalf of her Lady-

ship," she said to them, "to assure you that the young gentleman is not at home. She has sent for him, and he will be here shortly. Sit down a while. We know you have suffered, but, when the young master comes back, he will certainly make it up to you. We don't blame you for coming since you have been mixed up in this affair. Besides, you came by order of the court and not of your own accord. I'm sure that, when the young master comes back, it will all end happily."

When they heard this, they cried, with one accord: "Old woman, you are talking sense. If you had come before and spoken to us in this strain, we should not have been so impatient and ill-mannered. But, you see, we could get nothing out of them but: 'He is not at home.' Nothing else. And it looked as if we were held responsible for all the trouble. He was the cause of our being beaten, and now the police are after him. What's the use his trying to get out of it with a 'not at home'? Does he get someone else to take his place when he is eating meat or drinking wine? Old woman, you seem to see things in the proper light. Here is a hint for you. If he likes to spend a little money and get the matter settled, well and good. It might even be managed without his seeing us, if he doesn't wish to do so. This is a military court and things are more easily settled in it."

"Brothers," the old woman said, "there is much wisdom in what you say. I will ask the lady to have food and wine served for your entertainment. You must be hungry."

"Old mother," they said, "you seem to be sympathetic. To tell the truth, not a drop of water has passed our lips since we left the court."

Old woman Wên went back to the inner court, and foraged about till she got two ch'ien's worth of wine, one ch'ien's worth of cakes, and several large plates of pork, mutton, and beef. These were taken to the men, and she encouraged them to set to. Meanwhile, Wang III dressed himself in academic robes and wrote a petition. Old woman Wên smuggled him through the inner court. He put on a pair of eye-shades and they walked to Hsi-mên's house.

When they reached the gateway, P'ing An, who knew old woman Wên, said: "My master is in the great hall. What do you want with him?"

The old woman handed him a visiting-card and said: "Brother, kindly take this to your master." She asked Wang III to give two ch'iens of silver to the boy. P'ing An took the card to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên looked at it. It bore the inscription: 'The young student, Wang Ts'ai.'

He sent for old woman Wên, and she told him what had happened. He went into the hall and sent the boy to ask Wang III to go in. He did not change his clothes before going to receive the visitor. When he saw Wang III dressed in full ceremonial attire, he said to the old woman: "Sister Wên, why didn't you tell me? I am not suitably dressed." He said to the servants: "Bring my clothes at once." Wang III hastily stopped them.

"Uncle," he said, "pray don't trouble. I have come to see you but I beg you not to put yourself to any inconvenience."

When they were in the great hall, Wang III insisted upon making a most profound reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Hsi-mên smiled. "This is my house," he said, "I can't possibly allow it." He made the first reverence himself.

"How sorry I am that I have never called on you before," Wang III began.

"I hardly feel that we are strangers," Hsi-mên said.

Again, Wang III pressed Hsi-mên Ch'ing to accept the honour. "I am your nephew," he said, "and you must accept it. It will show that you forgive me for having troubled you."

They compromised. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked the young man to sit down. Wang III sat politely upon the edge of his chair. Tea was brought.

"I am very anxious for your assistance," Wang III said, taking a paper from his sleeve. He handed it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and knelt down.

Hsi-mên pulled him up again. "Tell me what I can do for you," he said.

"I am utterly ashamed of myself," Wang III said. "Only for the sake of my ancestors and their good fame do I venture to ask your forgiveness. Save me from the courts and I will remember your kindness for ever. I am afraid, afraid."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing unrolled the paper and looked at it. The five names were written on it.

"What?" he said. "These rogues again? I have given them one beating to-day. Why have they come to you?"

"They said that, when you had done with them, you ordered them to come for me. They are at my house now, roaring and shrieking insults. They demand money. There was nothing I could do but come and implore your help." He brought out a list of presents and gave it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"Why do you offer me this?" Hsi-mên said. "When I threw out those rogues, I had no idea they would come and make trouble with you." He returned the list of presents to the young man. "Go home," he said, "I will send and have the scoundrels arrested at once. I hope I may see you again soon."

"Since you have been so kind," the young man said, "I will certainly come to offer my thanks." He went out uttering innumerable protestations of gratitude.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went with him as far as the second door. "I will not go farther with you," he said, "since I am not wearing my ceremonial dress." Wang III put on his eye-shades and went away with a boy. Old woman Wên waited to see Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "Not a word to those fellows," he said to her, "I am sending men to arrest them at once." Old woman Wên rejoined Wang III.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent four soldiers and a sergeant to the young man's house. The rascals were drinking and making a terrible din. The soldiers went in and arrested them. So frightened were they when the chains were put on them that they became as pale as death.

"Wang III has deceived us finely," they said. "He got us to stay here and then played this trick upon us."

"No nonsense now!" said the soldiers, "you had better beg for mercy from his Lordship Hsi-mên."

"You are right," Little Chang said.

They came to Hsi-mên's house. The soldiers and P'ing An held out their hands for money, saying if they did not get it, they would not take them in. The men could not help themselves. Some took off their cloaks, others gave their pins, and, at last, word was taken to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. There was a long delay, then Hsi-mên Ch'ing came to the hall and they were taken in. They fell upon their knees.

"Now, you rogues," Hsi-mên said, "I sent you about your business, and you went and pretended you had come from me, in an attempt to get money from these people. How much did you get? If you don't tell me, it will mean the screws again."

At this, the soldiers got busy with the thumb-screws, new and strong ones. Little Chang and his companions kotowed and begged for mercy. "We didn't get a penny," they said. "It is true we told them the court had ordered us to go there, but they only gave us something to eat. We never asked for anything else."

"You had no business there at all," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "You scoundrelly fellows are always leading honest young men astray. I loathe the very sight of you. If you do not confess, you shall be thrown into gaol and, to-morrow, I will try you and have cangues put about your necks."

They all cried: "Heaven have mercy on us! Be merciful, and we will never go and cause them trouble again. Even if we don't get the cangue, to have to go to gaol at a cold season like this will certainly be the death of us."

"Once again I forgive you," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but you must repent and give up your evil ways. Henceforth, devote yourselves to steady honest work and don't go leading young men into evil courses. If you come before me again, I will have you beaten to death." He told the soldiers to kick them out. They ran for their lives. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the inner court.

"Who was your young visitor?" the Moon Lady asked him.

"It was Wang III, the heir to General Wang. You remember the trouble there was some time ago at Cassia's house? It was the same young man. He has been keeping that little strumpet and giving her thirty taels a month. No wonder she has been behaving so strangely. She had this young fellow completely at her feet. I found out about it and sent to arrest the rogues and have them brought before me. I had them beaten. Then they went to the Wangs' place and created a disturbance in the hope of getting money out of the young man. They told him I wanted him. He has never been before the court, and he was frightened and came with old woman

Wên to ask me to help him. He brought fifty taels. I had the fellows re-arrested and put a stop to their games. They will make no more trouble. But what an unfortunate thing for that family to have such a bad young man. His grandfather was a man of great eminence, a general, in fact. This young man is at the military academy, but he never gives a thought to his career, neglects his flower-like young wife, and goes with these rascals to the bawdy-house every night. All these bad habits before he is twenty."

"You seem to me like a young blackbird making disparaging remarks about a black pig," the Moon Lady said. "You only see things from your own point of view. You fancy yourself an angel, but, to me, you and he appear to have drunk from the same well. Are you a better man than he is that you should find fault with his goings on?"

Hsi-mên Ch'ing made no reply to this. Food was brought. Then Lai An came and said Ying Po-chüeh had come. "Take him to the study. I will be there in a few minutes," Hsi-mên said to the boy. Wang Ching opened the study and showed in Po-chüeh. Some time later, Hsi-mên Ch'ing joined him. The two men sat down to talk.

"Why did you leave Brother Hsieh's place so early the other day?" Po-chüeh asked.

"I have been very busy, and it is almost time for the inspection. I have sent people to the Capital to see what they can find out. You mustn't compare me with yourself, you, who never have anything to do."

"Has there been anything of interest at the office lately?" Ying Po-chüeh said.

"There is always something," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I hear you had Little Chang and some others arrested at Cassia's place the other evening. Old Sun and Chu escaped, but the others got a beating at the office. When they had left there, they went and made trouble at Wang's place. Why wouldn't you tell me?"

"You dog!" Hsi-mên said, "where did you hear all this? You have got hold of the wrong story. It was not my court, but Major Chou's."

"Nothing of the sort," Po-chüeh said, "Major Chou had nothing to do with it."

"Perhaps somebody came from the Eastern Capital."

"Li Ming told me all about it this morning," Po-chüeh said. "He said his people were in a terrible state, and Cassia, who was almost frightened to death, is still in bed. They thought the runners had come from the Eastern Capital but, this morning, they found it was your office."

"I haven't been to the office for several days," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I know nothing about it. As for Cassia, she swore an oath that she would never have anything more to do with Wang III. I don't believe she is so frightened that she is still in bed."

Ying Po-chüeh caught the flicker of a smile about Hsi-men's lips. "Brother," he said, "you almost took me in. Do tell me. How did old Sun and Chu manage to escape? I can't believe the runners are so careless when they arrest people. You had a finger in the pie, somewhere. You evidently determined to punish the sheep so as to teach the young horses a lesson. I suppose you meant to frighten Cassia, and let her realise what a powerful man you are. You wouldn't go so far as to arrest her—that would have been too hard, so you treat one set of people in one way and another set in another way. If old Sun and Chu meet you, they won't know what to say for themselves. It was a very clever move on your part, making a show of repairing the bridge in one place and secretly posting your soldiers in another. Without flattering you, Brother, I must say it was a very clever scheme. A brilliant man never gives himself away. If you had done this openly, there would be nothing very remarkable about it. How deep you are, and how you understand human nature!"

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed softly. "There is nothing in that," he said.

"Surely someone gave you a hint?" Po-chüeh said. "You would never have known so much about it otherwise. Why, neither ghosts nor gods could ever have found it out."

"You dog," Hsi-mên said, "if people don't wish things of this sort to come out, they had better refrain from doing them."

"Aren't you going to have Wang III before the court?"

"Why should I?" Hsi-mên said. "When the case was first brought to my notice, I crossed out the names of Wang III,

Chu, old Sun, Cassia and Jade Bracelet. I only had those few scamps arrested."

"Why did they make trouble with Wang III?"

"They hoped to get money out of him. But Wang III came to see me. He kotowed and begged my pardon, so I had the rogues arrested once more and told them I would have cangues put about their necks. They begged for mercy and swore they would never go near him again. As for Wang III, he addressed me as 'Uncle' before he said a word. He brought me a present list representing about fifty taels, but I told him to take it away. He has promised to ask me to go to his place so that he may thank me."

Po-chüeh was surprised. "Did he really and truly apologise to you?" he said.

"Do you think I'm lying to you?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He told Wang Ching to go and get Wang III's card. Wang Ching came back with the card. Po-chüeh examined it. "The young student, Wang Ts'ai", it said.

"Really, it was a brilliant scheme," he said.

"If you see any of them," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "don't tell them I know all that is to be known."

"I understand," Po-chüeh said. "You don't wish them to realise it was all your idea. Of course, I won't say a word."

They had tea. Then Po-chüeh said: "I must go. Old Sun and Chu might come to see you. If they do, don't tell them I have been here."

"I shall not see them, if they do come," Hsi-mên said. He sent a boy to tell the door-keeper that, if the two men came, they were to be told he was not at home.

After this, Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not go near Cassia. When he had a party at his house, he did not engage Li Ming. Relations between them were completely broken off.

Chapter Seventy

HSI-MÊN CH'ING VISITS THE CAPITAL

The Emperor said
That he would choose strong men and scholars,
That the wise should be as his arms and legs.
Now the art of letters is purified,
Rites and Music have regained their influence.
Men of nobility go to the palace
And the gate of guests is entered by men of worth.
The royal bounty is bestowed upon the people
Beyond all expectation.
The benevolence of the Ruler is above all things.

HSI-MÊN CH'ING had sent a man to Huai-ch'ing to get news from Captain Lin. The captain gave him a copy of the Imperial Gazette and five ch'iens of silver, and the man travelled back post-haste to Ch'ing Ho. Hsia and Hsi-mên Ch'ing were waiting for him at the office. They opened the envelope. First they read the document which dealt with the inspection of the officials in their district. It related his Majesty's approval of the project to investigate the conduct of the officers, and spoke of Hsia and Hsi-mên Ch'ing in these terms:

Hsia Yen-ling, Captain and Magistrate in the Province of Shan-tung. An officer of excellent reputation and considerable experience. In a former appointment he kept his district in admirable order, and, in the position he now holds, has done even better. He deserves promotion as a thoroughly capable official and one worthy of high rank in the service.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing, Vice-Captain and Deputy-Magistrate, is also an efficient officer. He is renowned for the subtlety of his judgments, and, being a wealthy man, he does not accept bribes. He is attentive to his duties and carries them out satisfactorily. He has never received a penny which is not justly his due. He maintains the dignity of the law and the people respect him. His promotion to the full rank of Captain is suggested, and he should be confirmed in his appointment as Magistrate.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted with his promotion. But Magistrate Hsia, when he learned that he had been appointed to the Imperial Escort, changed colour and could not speak for several minutes.

The other document was from the Office of Works. It related his Majesty's satisfaction with the work that had been done in the transport of materials for the *Kên To* mountain, ordered that half the taxes should be remitted in districts which had suffered from the work of transport, and that the dykes and weirs which had been destroyed should be replaced by officers of the Office of Works and the Provincial Authorities. Among the rewards granted in this document was a step in rank to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

When Hsia and Hsi-mên had finished reading it, they went home. That afternoon, Wang III sent old woman Wên and a boy to invite Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go and see him on the eleventh of the month. He wished, he said, to express his gratitude for the favour Hsi-mên Ch'ing had done him. Hsi-mên accepted the invitation with considerable pleasure, thinking that, in good time, Wang III's wife would fall into his hands.

On the evening of the tenth, orders came from Headquarters in the Eastern Capital summoning all the military officers of the Province to the Capital. They were to arrive before the day of the Winter Festival, and to attend at Court to express their gratitude to the Emperor. The order declared that anyone who arrived late would be punished.

The next day Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to discuss the matter with Magistrate Hsia, then both men went home and set about the preparation of their luggage. They made ready presents and prepared to start in good time.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent Tai An for old woman Wên and asked her to tell Wang III that he would be unable to keep his engagement because he had to go to the Eastern Capital to see the Emperor. The old woman hurried to Wang III and told him. Wang III said he would renew his invitation when Hsi-mên came back.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing summoned Pên IV and told him he was going to take him to the Eastern Capital. He gave him five taels of silver for household expenses. Tai An and Wang

Ching were also detailed to go, but Ch'un Hung was left behind. Hsi-mên asked Major Chou for an escort of four horse soldiers. Sedan-chairs and horses were made ready.

Magistrate Hsia took with him only Hsia Shou, but, in all, there were more than twenty attendants.

They started from Ch'ing Ho on the twelfth. It was winter and the days were short, but they travelled night and day. At Huai-ch'ing they hoped to join Captain Lin, but he had started before them. They went on. When it was particularly cold they stayed in their sedan-chairs, but, on the warmer days, they rode on horseback.

At last they reached the Eastern Capital and entered the city by the gate of Ten Thousand Blessings. Hsi-mên Ch'ing proposed to stay at a temple, but Hsia insisted that they should go together to his kinsman, Secretary Ts'ui. Hsi-mên, who did not know Ts'ui, sent his card before him. When they reached the house, the Secretary was at home. He came out to welcome them and led them to the hall. They exchanged greetings. Ts'ui said how delighted he was to see Magistrate Hsia; they sat down, and tea was brought.

"May I know your honourable name?" Ts'ui said, bowing to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"My humble name is Ssü-ch'üan," Hsi-mên said.

He asked Ts'ui's name.

"I am a very insignificant fellow," Ts'ui said, "and I am living in retirement. My humble name is Shou-yü, and I am also called Hsün-chai. My kinsman, Hsia, has often told me of your pre-eminent virtue. I trust your favour may always uphold and support him."

"He has taught me all I know," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Now that he has been promoted, I shall be dependent upon him in many ways. I owe him much."

"Why do you flatter me?" Hsia said. "It would seem as though we were strangers."

"Ssü-ch'üan is right," Ts'ui said, "you are his senior in rank."

They laughed. Their luggage was carried into the house. It was growing late. Secretary Ts'ui ordered a meal to be prepared for them and they spent the night in his house.

The next morning they set off very early with their presents

and visiting-cards to the palace of the Imperial Tutor. His Eminence was still at the Court, but officers and people flocked like bees outside his palace. Hsia and Hsi-mên Ch'ing had great difficulty in forcing their way through the crowd. They made a present to the gatekeeper, and their cards were taken in.

Chai came out to greet them and took them to his own house. Magistrate Hsia saluted him and Hsi-mên Ch'ing greeted him. They sat down. Hsia presented his list of gifts. He offered two rolls of golden satin, two rolls of figured satin to the Imperial Tutor and ten taels of silver to Chai. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had brought a roll of scarlet silk with embroidered dragons, a roll of black silk, also embroidered, and two rolls of official silk for the Imperial Tutor. To Chai he offered a roll of dark green velvet and thirty taels of silver.

Chai told the servants to take the presents for the Imperial Tutor to his palace, and to inscribe their names in the visitors book. He accepted the velvet which Hsi-mên Ch'ing had brought for him, but would not take the silver from either of them.

"It would not be right," he said. "If I took money from you it would look as though we were not good friends."

He told a servant to prepare a meal for them. "To-day," he said, "his Majesty has set the finishing touch to the building he began at the behest of Heaven, and the title is being set up. His Eminence is presiding over the sacrifice. He will not be able to get away before the afternoon. When he comes back, he is going with Li Pang-yen to a party at the palace of the Chêngs, who are connected with the Imperial Household. I doubt whether you will care to wait so long, and your other business may be delayed. Do not wait. When his Eminence is at liberty, I will speak to him for you. That will be just as good as if you saw him yourselves."

"It is extremely kind of you, kinsman," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Chai asked Hsi-mên where he was staying. Hsi-mên told him he was with Hsia at Secretary Ts'ui's house.

The meal was now ready. There were a great many dishes, prepared in the manner of the court and served in huge plates and dishes. The food was delicious. When Hsi-mên and his colleague had drunk three cups of wine they rose and pre-

pared to leave, but Chai begged them to stay and pressed them to drink again.

"Kinsman," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "when shall I be able to see his Majesty?"

"You will not be so fortunate as his Lordship Hsia," the Comptroller said. "He is now one of the officers of the Capital. You and the newly appointed Vice-Captain, Ho Yung-shou, Chamberlain Ho's nephew, who are law officers—he is to be your assistant—will have to wait until his Lordship Hsia has seen his Majesty. He will wait for you and, after your audience, you will get your commissions together. Whatever you wish to do after that, you will have to consult his Lordship."

Hsia listened but said nothing.

"Kinsman," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "will it be possible for me to see his Majesty when he has returned from the worship of Heaven on the day of the Winter Festival?"

"Can you wait all that time?" Chai said. "When he comes back, all the officials of the Empire will offer their congratulations and there will probably be a royal banquet. I don't see how you can wait till then. You had better go to the Registry to-day, and to-morrow go to Court and see his Majesty. Then you will be able to go home as soon as you have secured your papers."

"Thank you," Hsi-mên said, "I will do as you command. I don't know how I can ever repay your kindness."

As they were going away, the Comptroller took Hsi-mên Ch'ing aside. "When I sent you that letter," he said reproachfully, "didn't I tell you to be most careful and not let your colleague know what should have been a secret between ourselves? What made you tell Hsia? He wrote to his Holiness Lin, and Lin persuaded Marshal Chu to come to his Eminence and say that Hsia did not wish to come to the Capital to take a post in the Imperial Escort. He wished to remain another three years at Ch'ing Ho. Chamberlain Ho brought the matter before his Majesty's favourite concubine, and she herself approached both Marshal Chu and his Eminence and urged the appointment of Ho Yung-shou as the deputy. This produced a most awkward situation. His Eminence was placed in a very difficult position. If I had not spoken to his

Eminence on your behalf, and persuaded him to refuse Lin's petition, you would have found yourself without any appointment at all, my dear kinsman."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was greatly disturbed. "I am most grateful to you," he said, "but, really, I never mentioned the matter to anyone. I can't imagine how it came out."

"If a man doesn't keep things like that secret, so much the worse for him," Chai said. "You must be more careful in future."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing thanked him again and went away with Hsia. They returned to Ts'ui's house. Hsi-mên sent Pên IV to the Registry to put down their names, and the next day, he and Hsia, dressed in black robes and hats of ceremony, went to the Imperial Palace to express their gratitude for his Majesty's favour.

As they were coming out by the West Gate, a man in plain clothes came up and said: "Which of you gentlemen is Master Hsi-mên, the law officer from Shan-tung?"

Pên IV asked the man who he was.

"I am from Chamberlain Ho, the Bailiff of the Imperial Palace. He would like to speak to Master Hsi-mên."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a eunuch, wearing a scarlet robe embroidered with dragons, a ceremonial hat, and black boots, came out upon the Imperial roadway and said: "Greetings, my lord Hsi-mên."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing left Magistrate Hsia. The eunuch took him by the hand and led him to a place apart. The eunuch bowed and Hsi-mên knelt down to make a reverence in return.

"You do not know me, my Lord," the eunuch said, "I am Ho, the Bailiff of the Imperial Palace, and the Chamberlain of his Majesty's fourth lady. Recently, when I had completed my service, his Majesty was graciously pleased to appoint my nephew, Ho Yung-shou, Vice-Captain and Deputy Magistrate in your district of Ch'ing Ho. He will be your colleague."

"I must apologise for not recognising your Excellency," Hsi-mên Ching said. He bowed again. "This is a prohibited place and I cannot salute you here in a manner befitting your dignity. I trust you will allow me to visit you in your own palace."

They sat down and a servant brought tea. A food-box was opened and many delicacies were set upon a table. Cups and chop-sticks were brought.

"We will not use the small cups," the eunuch said, "I know you have just come from the Court, and you must be feeling cold. Besides, I have made such meagre preparation for you, that it would not be right. Such food as this will only give you an appetite."

"I must not put you to any trouble," Hsi-mên said.

Eunuch Ho filled a large cup and offered it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"Since you are so gracious," Hsi-mên said, "I must accept it, but I have to call upon a number of other officers, and I fear my face will be unbecomingly red."

"Oh, a cup or two to keep out the cold will not do you any harm. My nephew is very young," the eunuch continued. "He knows nothing of the law. I shall consider it a favour to myself if you will teach him whatever is necessary for him to know."

"Your Excellency," Hsi-mên said, "pray do not be formal with me. Your nephew may be young, but I have no doubt that, having been brought up in so exalted a household, he is extremely intelligent."

"That is very kind of you. But the proverb says: Though we keep learning to the end of our days, we still know very little. The things one should know are as many as the hairs on an ox. Even Confucius was only able to acquire a leg-full. I am afraid he is sure to make mistakes and I hope you will correct him."

"At your Excellency's service," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Will you be good enough to tell me where your palace is situated, that I may come and call upon you?"

"My humble dwelling is in the Wên Hua Fang, east of the Bridge of the Heavenly River. There are two lions outside the door. We use them as mounting-blocks. Tell me where you are staying and I will send someone to call on you."

"Secretary Ts'ui has been good enough to give me a room," Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him.

He drank a large cup of wine and rose. Eunuch Ho took him to the gate. "Do not forget what I have said," the eunuch

said. "Perhaps you will wait for my nephew and get your commissions together."

"Certainly," Hsi-mên said.

He left the palace and went to the Ministry of War, where he found Hsia. They went together to pay their respects to the officials of the Ministry. When they came to the office of their own regiment, they went to call upon Grand Marshal Chu. They handed in their records of service and then visited the Military Secretary and other officials.

It was now late in the afternoon. Hsia changed his clothes, put on the robes of his new office, and sent in his card to the Grand Marshal. Chu would not allow him to kotow. Hsia reported the date upon which he would enter upon his duties and came away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was waiting for him. Hsi-mên hesitated to ride side by side with Hsia any longer. He asked him to mount his horse first, but Hsia insisted that they should go together as before. Hsi-mên kept addressing him as 'Sir' and 'My Lord' till Hsia said: "Ssü-ch'üan, you and I have always been colleagues. Why do you speak to me in this formal way?"

"You are of higher rank now, and it is right that I should. Now that your Lordship has attained this high position, you will not be returning to Shan-tung, I suppose. When will you bring your family here?"

"I would have brought them with me, but there is nobody to look after my house," Hsia said. "I think I shall stay with relatives here and send for my family next year. Perhaps you will be good enough to keep an eye on them. If you can find anyone who will buy my house, I hope you will sell it for me. I shall be glad to make it worth your while."

"How much is your house worth?" Hsi-mên asked.

"I paid one thousand three hundred taels for it," Hsia said. "Then I built another wing, and that cost me two hundred taels more. I am prepared to sell it for what it cost."

They went back to Secretary Ts'ui's house. Wang Ching reported that Master Ho had been to call upon Hsi-mên. "I told him," the boy said, "that you were not yet back from the Ministry. He asked me to present his compliments to his Lordship Hsia, and left two cards. A man came and brought two rolls of silk from him."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Wang Ching to get two rolls of Nan-ching five-coloured silk, and wrote a card to go with them. He had something to eat as quickly as possible and hastened to the eunuch's house. When he entered the great hall, Captain Ho came out to greet him. The young man was dressed in black ceremonial hat and boots. He seemed not more than twenty years old and looked so handsome that one might have thought his face was powdered and his lips rouged. He saluted Hsi-mên Ch'ing modestly yet with the utmost grace.

Hsi-mên told Tai An to bring in the presents. "I hear that you have been good enough to call upon me and to bring me most precious gifts," he said. "I am sorry I was not there to receive you. This morning, his Excellency your uncle was kind enough to entertain me at the palace. I am grateful to him."

Captain Ho made a reverence. "I have been made an officer of the lowest grade," he said, "and count myself supremely fortunate to have been appointed to your office. I hope to benefit by your instruction."

They continued to exchange compliments.

"My lord," Captain Ho said, "have you called upon the Grand Marshal?"

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I went to the Ministry immediately after leaving his Excellency, your uncle. I went to our headquarters, handed in my record of service and called on the officers there. When I came away, it was my intention to call upon you. I never dreamed you would call on me first."

"Did you go to the Palace with his Lordship Hsia?"

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "We went together to the court, but as he has been appointed to the Imperial Escort, when we called at the Ministry, we handed in our papers and sent in our cards separately."

"Do we send presents to the Minister, or wait till we receive our commissions?" Captain Ho said.

"My kinsman tells me," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "that we should send our presents first. Then the Marshal will present us at court, and afterwards we shall get out commissions."

"In that case," Ho said, "we had better send our presents to-morrow morning."

They discussed the question of a suitable present. Captain Ho decided to offer two rolls of silk and a jade buckle. Hsi-mên Ch'ing would offer a roll of scarlet satin, a roll of black silk and a gold ring inlaid with jade. Each would offer four jars of *Chin Hua* wine in addition. They arranged to meet outside the Marshal's house. They had tea, and Hsi-mên Ch'ing took leave of his new colleague and went home. He said nothing to Hsia of the arrangements he had made.

The next morning, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to Captain Ho's place. He had prepared an excellent meal and Hsi-mên Ch'ing and his servants were admirably provided for. Pên IV and Ho's servants were given charge of the presents and Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Ho Yung-shou went together to the Marshal's house.

Marshal Chu was not at home. Officials of every grade were waiting with their presents in a crowd outside the gate. Captain Ho and Hsi-mên Ch'ing dismounted and went into a house near by, whose master they knew. They sent a man to watch for the Minister's return. They waited until the afternoon. Then the man came running to say that the Marshal was coming back from the sacrifice by the South Gate. Already, he said, orders were being given to clear the way for him.

Soon afterwards, the man came again. "The Marshal has reached the Bridge of the Heavenly River," he said. There came an escort of officials and soldiers, with banners and weapons. They marched in pairs, shouting. Then, still a long way off, Hsi-mên and his companion could see Marshal Chu. He was sitting in a sedan-chair carried by eight footmen; another eight footmen followed. He was wearing a ceremonial hat and a scarlet gown; a piece of white jade formed the clasp of his girdle. He wore a golden fish, the insignia of his office, and looked extremely dignified.

The escort reached the gate and halted. Then they turned inwards to form a guard. There was perfect silence among the onlookers. No one dared even to cough. The officers came forward to greet the Grand Marshal and knelt on the ground before him. As the sedan-chair approached, the com-

mand was given to stand up, and the officers immediately obeyed. The sound of their acclamations reached the skies.

Suddenly there came from the East the strains of music. The principal officers in the Minister's department had arranged for this in honour of the exalted rank which had been conferred upon him by the Emperor's recent decree, and also to celebrate his son's entry into official life.

When the Minister got down from his sedan-chair the music stopped. The officers were preparing to present themselves to him when, suddenly, a messenger in black clothes, carrying two red cards, rushed forward and handed the cards to another official. "Their Excellencies, Chang of the Board of Rites and Vice-Chancellor Ts'ai, are here." The man went into the house to give warning to his master. Then, in two sedan-chairs, came Chang Pang-ch'ang and Ts'ai Yu. They were both wearing scarlet ceremonial robes with peacocks embroidered upon them. One had a buckle of rhinoceros horn upon his girdle, the other, one of gold.

Following them came Wang Tsü-tao, President of the Board of Civil Service, with Han Lü the Minister of the Left, and Yin Ching, the Minister of the Right. Marshal Chu offered them tea, and they came away at once.

Then came the Duke of Hsi-kuo, a kinsman of the Imperial House, the President of the Privy Council, Chêng Chü-chung, and the Master of the Household, the Imperial Son-in-law, Wang Chin-Ch'ing. They all wore girdles with jade buckles. Chêng rode in a sedan-chair, but the others were on horseback.

When they had gone, the six officers of the Marshal's own department paid their respects to him. First came the Commander-in-chief of the troops at the Capital, Sun Jung; then, in order, Liang Ying-lung, Commissioner of Police; and the others, all wearing red cloaks and fur hats. Sun Jung had a jade buckle to his girdle by virtue of his rank, but the rest wore gold buckles. They all brought presents.

There was music within the palace as the generals, wearing golden flowers, offered wine to the Grand Marshal. There was music in the courtyard while the banquet proceeded within. When they had offered wine the generals sat down. Five singers came in, and to the accompaniment of lute and

guitar, sang a song in celebration of the occasion, beating time with ivory castanets.

When the wine had been passed three times, the song ended. The six generals rose and the Grand Marshal went with them as far as the gate. Then he returned to the hall, and the music died away. A servant told him that many officers wished to see him. He ordered a great table to be brought and set in the middle of the hall.

"Let the noblemen of the Court and those of high family be first admitted," he commanded.

They came in, and retired again immediately. Then all the officers of his own department were introduced. They came with their cards, and these were handed to him. Then came the law officers of the thirteen provinces in relays. Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Captain Ho were in the fifth party. Their presents were brought in, and an attendant took the list and placed it on the table. They came in and stood at the foot of the steps waiting for their names to be announced. While they waited, Hsi-mên looked up and admired the magnificent proportions of the great hall and the great red sign with four characters upon it which had been written by the Emperor's own hand. Their names were called and the two men went forward, bowed, knelt down and waited.

"Why have you two gentlemen troubled the venerable chamberlain to send me a present?" the Grand Marshal said. He told his servants to take their gifts. "Do your duty, and I will treat you justly," he told them. "Stay until you have been to the Court and, afterwards, come to my Ministry for your papers."

The two men acknowledged the command the Marshal gave them. Then the attendants warned them to withdraw and they went out by a door on the left. As they passed through the gateway, Pên IV and the other servants were carrying out the empty boxes. They were about to go away, when a man, carrying a red card, galloped towards them. "Their Excellencies Wang and Kao are coming," he cried as he passed.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Captain Ho went into a house to watch the two noblemen pass. Soldiers cleared the way. Then came Wang Hua, Duke of Lung-hsi, Commander of the

Royal Guard, and Marshal Kao Ch'iu. They rode in sedan-chairs, and wore red jade buckles on their girdles. The officers rushed out of the palace in a crowd and Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Captain Ho lost sight of the two dignitaries. They went to a quiet place, took their horses from the servants, and rode home.

Chapter Seventy-one

THE SON OF HEAVEN

The flowers droop and the sweet grass is faded
He is a stranger in a strange place.
In the little courtyard
He thinks of her whom he has lost.
It is evening, and his tears
Drop red as blood.
Mountain and river are parted
His eyes are dim, his spirit ill at ease.
It seems that her sweet spirit has vanished utterly.

When, at the fifth night-watch, he woke from his dream
His heart was broken.
The wind brought the sound of horns
And swept away the moon and the plum blossom.

HSI-MEN CH'ING and Captain Ho came to the principal street. Ho asked Hsi-mên to take wine with him at his house, but Hsi-mên Ch'ing very politely declined. Then Ho bade his servant take Hsi-mên's bridle. "You must come," he said, "I am anxious to talk to you." So they went to Ho's place, and Pên IV took the empty present boxes back to Secretary Ts'ui's house.

Captain Ho had made special preparations for his guest. In the great hall, animal charcoal was burning in the braziers, and the smoke of incense went curling upwards from golden burners. There was a table in the middle of the hall, and beside it two other tables, one nearer the door and the other at one side. Bowls piled with rare fruits stood on the tables and flowers in golden vases.

"Are you entertaining any other guests?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Captain Ho.

"No," Ho said. "My old uncle will dine with us when he comes back."

"Since we are to be colleagues," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "you should not have gone to all this trouble on my account."

"I beg your pardon," Ho said, "but, as a matter of fact, my venerable uncle has done this."

When they had drunk tea, Hsi-mên asked if he might pay his respects to the eunuch. Ho said he would not be long and, in a short time, Eunuch Ho came from the back of the house. He was wearing a green dragon-gown, ceremonial hat and boots, and a jewel at his girdle. Hsi-mên Ch'ing bowed to him and asked leave to kotow, but the eunuch would not allow him to do so.

"Your Excellency is distinguished both by age and virtue," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "You are a nobleman of the Court and, as your nephew and I are colleagues, you must permit me to do so."

They wrangled for some time and, at last, the old eunuch accepted a compromise. He asked Hsi-mên Ch'ing to take the place of honour, seated himself in the host's chair, and put his nephew on one side. Hsi-mên Ch'ing protested. "We are fellow officers," he said. "I cannot allow him to take a lower position than myself. It would be seemly so far as your Excellency and he are concerned, for you are uncle and nephew, but it is not right for me."

The eunuch smiled. "Sir," he said, "you seem to understand the Rites very well. I am an old fellow. I will take the lower place and let the officer take mine."

"That would be even more insupportable," Hsi-mên said. They finally sat down as they had before.

"It is cold," the eunuch said to the servants, "put more coal on the fire."

The servants brought fine water-polished charcoal and put it in the brazier. They pulled down the oiled-paper blind outside the hall. It was so arranged that, when the sun shone, it shone through the paper and gave light to the hall.

"Sir," the eunuch said, "will you take off your ceremonial clothes?"

"I have nothing underneath," Hsi-mên said, "I must send my servant for something."

"Don't trouble to do that," the eunuch said. He bade one of his servants bring his green gown.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing smiled. "How dare I put on the robes of your Excellency's rank?"

"Don't let that worry you," the eunuch said. "Put it on by all means. His Majesty gave me this new robe yesterday. I

shall have no further use for the old one, and I should be glad if you would accept it and use it as a cloak."

When the servant brought it, Hsi-mên Ch'ing took off his ceremonial clothes and gave them to Tai An. He put on the green robe, bowed to express his thanks to the eunuch and asked him, in turn, to take off his robes of ceremony. Tea was brought again.

"Let the boys come in," the eunuch commanded.

He had twelve boys being trained as singers. They were brought in by their instructors. They kotowed. The eunuch bade them begin, and they went to their places. The eunuch himself prepared to offer wine to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, but Hsi-mên hastily begged him not to do so.

"Your Excellency, pray do not offer me wine yourself," he said. "The Captain will do it for you. I shall be more than happy if you set the cup on the table before me."

"I must do so," the eunuch said. "My nephew has now secured his first appointment. He is quite ignorant. I am placing my confidence in your kind assistance. With it, I am sure, all will be well."

"Your Excellency," Hsi-mên said, "the old proverb says: When men become fellow officers, there will be friendship between them and their descendants for three generations. I am in your hands. How can I fail to do my utmost for your nephew?"

"You are both in the service of his Majesty," the eunuch said. "For that reason, you must help one another."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing did not wait for the eunuch to pour the wine for him. He took the cup from his hands and set it down on the table. In his turn, he offered a cup to the eunuch and to Captain Ho. They bowed to each other and sat down.

After a prelude, three boys and their instructors played the guitar and the lute and sang the songs 'Visiting Chao P'u' and 'The Silken Hangings in the Palace of Crystal'. When they had finished their songs they withdrew.

The wine was passed several times and the second course brought. It was growing dark, and the lamps were lighted. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Tai An to give some money to the cooks and the musicians. He rose and said: "I have troubled you sufficiently. I must go now."

The old eunuch would not hear of this. "I happen to be free to-day," he said, "and I wish you to stay. I have not made any special preparations for you. This is very ordinary food and I fear you must be starved."

"Starved!" Hsi-mên cried, "starved, with all this delightful food. I only wish to go back and rest because, to-morrow morning, I have to go with your nephew to pay a round of visits, have our names registered, and get the necessary documents."

"If you are going to be occupied with my nephew," the eunuch said, "why not send for your luggage and spend a few days here? There is a small apartment in my garden which you would find very quiet. You could discuss everything you have to discuss with my nephew, and you would find it most convenient."

"I should very much like to come," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but I must not offend his Lordship Hsia. If I come here, he may regard it as a sign that I am no longer anxious to be on good terms with him."

"Oh, you mustn't bother about that," the eunuch said. "Men who have been together in the same office are separated one morning, and, the same evening, do not even bow to one another. Officers come and go. You have served with him; he is now promoted and you succeed him. That's all there is to it. If he thinks otherwise, he is not a reasonable man. No, we must have the pleasure of your company for the night. I shall not allow you to go."

He said to his attendants: "Give something to eat to his Lordship's servants, and send somebody for his luggage. Get the apartment ready in the courtyard of the western garden, make up beds there, and get a fire going."

One word from his Excellency was sufficient. A hundred eyes were on the watch. Servants hurried to do his bidding.

"Your Excellency," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "this is very kind of you, but I am sure Hsia will be displeased."

"He has nothing more to do with your office," the eunuch said. "It doesn't matter what he thinks. He is now officer of the Imperial Escort, and has no more to do with affairs of the law. I don't believe he will mind in the least."

The eunuch said no more, but sent Tai An and the other

servant to have their evening meal. A number of other servants took poles and ropes and went to Ts'ui's place for Hsi-mên Ch'ing's things.

"There is one point I wish especially to mention to you," the eunuch said. "When my nephew assumes office, he will need a house. I hope you will help him to find one. I am anxious that his family should join him at Ch'ing Ho as soon as possible. I think he had better go with you, and I will arrange for his family to follow when you have secured a house for them. It is not a very large household, only about thirty people, including all the servants."

"How much is your Excellency prepared to spend?" Hsi-mên said.

"I suppose something more than a thousand."

"Now that Hsia is going to remain in the Capital," Hsi-mên said, "he will be getting rid of his house. You might buy that. It would be to the advantage of both parties. It is a good-sized house, seven rooms wide and five deep. When you go in by the second door, there is a large hall with side rooms. The living-rooms branch out in different directions behind that, and there are quite a number of other rooms. The house is in a good broad street. It ought to suit Captain Ho very well."

"How much does Hsia want for it?" the eunuch said.

"He told me he paid thirteen hundred for it," Hsi-mên said, "and later, he built an extra wing and made a garden. If your Excellency cares for the idea, I should offer any sum you consider suitable."

"I will leave the matter to you," the eunuch said. "You shall arrange it for me. I am at home now, so why not send someone to tell Hsia we think of buying his house and ask him for the title-deeds? We shall be lucky if we get it. My nephew will have somewhere to live as soon as he gets to Ch'ing Ho."

Tai An and a host of servants came with Hsi-mên's luggage. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him if Pên IV and Wang Ching had come.

"Wang Ching is here," Tai An said, "but Pên IV is still at Secretary Ts'ui's house, making arrangements about the sedan-chair."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing said softly to Tai An: "Go and see his Lordship Hsia, and ask him for the title-deeds of his house. His Excellency here would like to see them. Bring Pên IV back with you."

Tai An went. Pên IV, wearing black clothes and a small hat, soon came back with him. He brought the document.

"His Lordship Hsia," Pên IV said, "told us to say that, since his Excellency would like to have the house, there will be no difficulty about the price. Here are the title-deeds. He says that, though he built the wings and spent a great deal of money on the place, he will leave the price to you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing handed the papers to the eunuch. The sum mentioned was twelve hundred taels.

"Hsia has lived in the house a good many years," the eunuch said, "and I expect it needs doing up. But since you, Sir, are seeing the business through for me, I will give him the price he paid for it."

Pên IV knelt down. "Your Excellency does well," he said. "The proverb says: The establishment of an estate is an expensive business, and though in a thousand years, a house may change hands a hundred times, each new master will have it re-done his own way from top to bottom."

"Who are you?" said the eunuch. "You talk like a man of sense. You are right when you say that a man who is setting up an establishment mustn't mind how much he spends. What is your name?"

"He is called Pên IV," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Well, I don't see that we need look any further," the eunuch said. "You shall act as our representative, and get the thing fixed up for us. This is an auspicious day and I will pay Hsia his money."

"It is late now," Hsi-mên said, "why not pay him to-morrow?"

"No," the eunuch said, "I have to be at the Palace before dawn to-morrow. It is the day when all the officers come to pay their duty to his Majesty. We will settle with him to-day."

"At what time will the Emperor come out to-morrow?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked.

"His Majesty will go to make sacrifice about midnight," the eunuch said. "An hour or two before dawn he will return

and breakfast at the Palace. Then he will hold his court. All the officers of the Empire come at the Winter Festival to offer their congratulations. All the Ministers and some of the higher officials will remain for a banquet. You gentlemen simply attend the court."

The eunuch told Captain Ho to put twenty-four large bars of silver into a box, and ordered two servants to go with Pên IV and Tai An and take the money to Hsia at Secretary Ts'ui's house.

Hsia was pleased. He signed the document and gave it to Pên IV to take back to the eunuch. The eunuch, too, was satisfied. He gave ten taels of silver to Pên IV and three taels each to Tai An and Wang Ching.

"They are only boys," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "your Excellency should not have troubled to give them anything."

"It is only something to buy food with," the eunuch said. The three kotowed and thanked him.

Then the eunuch bowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "I am placing all my confidence in your kindness," he said.

"I am entirely at your Excellency's service," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"Now, Sir," the eunuch said, "please ask Hsia to have his place made free as soon as possible so that I can make arrangements for my nephew's family to take possession."

"I will certainly tell him," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Perhaps, when Captain Ho arrives at Ch'ing Ho, he will stay a few days at the office while Hsia's family make their preparations to leave for the Capital. Then we will have the place put in order and you will send your nephew's family."

"No," the eunuch said, "I think we will leave the question of repairs until next year. I will send his family before then. He will not be comfortable if he has to live so long alone at the office."

It was now the first night-watch. Hsi-mên Ch'ing said: "Will not your Excellency retire and take some rest? I have had wine enough."

The eunuch went to bed, but Captain Ho bade the musicians play, and went on drinking with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. When it was time to go to bed, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the garden. There was a small three-roomed apartment used as a study.

The garden was very delightful with its buildings, arbours, lake, hillocks, flowers, and woods. Candles burned brightly in the study, and fragrant incense burned. It was quiet and delightful. Captain Ho chatted for a while with Hsi-mên Ch'ing, and they took tea together. Then he said good night and went to his own rooms to sleep.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took off his hat, girdle and clothes and went to bed. Wang Ching and Tai An waited on him, then went to their own place.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing, lying on the bed, watched the moonbeams playing on the windows. He tossed about but could not sleep. He heard the drip, drip, drip of the water-clock. He saw the tall shadows of the plants upon the casement. The cold wind rattled the window-panes. He had now been away from home for some time and was thinking of calling Wang Ching to sleep with him. Suddenly, he heard a woman speaking very softly outside the window. He wrapped his cloak round him, put on his slippers, and quietly opened the door. He looked out. The Lady of the Vase stood there, her hair like mist. She was dressed in simple, beautiful clothes, and a white coat covered her snow-white body. She wore soft slippers, yellow coloured, upon her dainty feet. She stood there in the moonlight.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went forward, took her into the study and kissed her. "My darling!" he cried, "what has brought you here?"

"I have sought you," she said, "because I wanted to tell you that I have a new home now. I was anxious to let you know, because, sooner or later, I must go to it."

"Where is this house?" Hsi-mên asked her.

"Not far from here. It is in the middle of the Tsao Fu Lane, east of the main street."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing put his arms about her, and they went to bed that they might enjoy each other the more fully. When they had taken their pleasure, she made her clothes tidy and dressed her hair, but she was loath to go away.

"Brother," she said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing, "don't forget what I said to you. Do not drink wine late at night. Go home early. That fellow is only waiting his chance to destroy you. Remember."

Holding each other by the hand, they went to the main street. The moon shone so brightly that it might have been day. They came to a lane leading eastwards from the street. In the middle of it was a house with white double doors. The Lady of the Vase pointed to it. "That is the house," she said. She loosed her hand from his, and ran in. Hsi-mên dashed forward to stop her.

Then he awoke. It was a dream. The moon was still shining upon the window; the flowers cast a deeper shadow than before. He passed his hand over the bed-clothes. There was a pool upon them that seemed to show that all had not been in his imagination. He could still smell the delicate scent of her body upon the bed, and the lips which she had kissed were still sweet. He was very sad, but restrained his sobs.

There was no sleep for Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He longed for the day to break. At last, when dawn was near, he began to doze.

The next morning, Captain Ho sent his own servants to help Hsi-mên to dress, and himself came early to call upon him. They drank tea and breakfasted together.

"Why does his Excellency not come?" Hsi-mên asked.

"He went to the court before it was light," Captain Ho said.

They were served with gruel; then with pies stuffed with forcemeat, and soup of chickens' brains. They called for their horses, put on their ceremonial dress and went to the Ministry with their servants following. When they came out, Captain Ho went home, but Hsi-mên went to the Hsiang Kuo temple to visit the Abbot, Chih Yün. The Abbot entertained him with monastic fare, but Hsi-mên Ch'ing would only eat one cake and gave the rest to his servants. Then he went away, passing through the main street on his way to Secretary Ts'ui's house to see Hsia. They went through the Tsao Fu Lane. Half-way down it, he saw a house with white double doors exactly like the one he had seen in his dream. An old woman was selling bean-curd near by, and Hsi-mên told Tai An to ask her who lived in that house. "It is General Yüan's house," the old woman said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing sighed with curiosity and amazement. He came to Secretary Ts'ui's house. Hsia was setting out to pay a call. He immediately ordered his servant to take the horses away, and took Hsi-mên Ch'ing to the great hall. Hsi-mên

told Tai An to bring the presents which he wished to offer to Hsia upon his appointment. There was one roll of black silk and another of figured silk.

"I have not congratulated you," Hsia said to him, "yet you do so much for me. Yesterday you took a great deal of trouble over my house."

"Chamberlain Ho asked me about a house," Hsi-mên said, "and I told him about yours. He asked for the title-deeds, and agreed to the price without the slightest ado. That is just like a eunuch. They think they can build a bridge in a couple of seconds. But, after all, it was to your advantage."

They laughed. "I have not yet called on Captain Ho," Hsia said. "Is he going back with you?"

"Yes," Hsi-mên said. "And his family will follow later. His Excellency told me to ask you to be so good as to vacate the place as soon as you can so that he can send the Captain's family. Until you have done so he will have to stay at the office."

"That will not be very long," Hsia said. "I am looking for a house here and, as soon as I find one, I will send for my family. I don't see why the house should not be ready for him next month."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing rose. He left a card for Ts'ui. Hsia took him to the gate and waited till he had mounted his horse. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to Captain Ho's house. Ho was waiting to entertain him. Hsi-mên told him that Hsia had promised that his house should be free the following month. The Captain was delighted. "It is all due to your good offices," he said.

After dinner, while they were playing chess in the great hall, a servant came and said that a number of presents had come from the Imperial Tutor's comptroller Chai. They had been taken to Ts'ui's house, and the Secretary had sent them on. Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at the list. A roll of gold silk, a roll of patterned hempen material, a pig, a sheep, a jar of palace wine, and two boxes of cakes. All these were set down upon the card, and at the end of the list was written: 'Your kinsman Chai Ch'ien makes most humble salutation.'

"Your master has troubled himself once again on my account," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to the servants who brought

the things. He accepted the gifts, wrote a return card, and gave two taels to the servant and five ch'iens to each of the porters. To the servant he said: "You will understand that, as I am a stranger here and not versed in the usual customs, I am ashamed to offer such a reward." The man kotowed and accepted the money.

Wang Ching, who was standing beside his master, whispered: "I was told to go to the palace to see Wild Rose. I have brought something for her."

"What have you brought?" Hsi-mên asked him.

"Two pairs of home-made shoes," Wang Ching said.

"That is not enough," Hsi-mên said. He told Tai An to look in his chest and take out two jars of rose-flower biscuits. He gave them to Wang Ching, with a card of thanks for the presents, and the boy put on black robes and went to the Imperial Tutor's palace with the servant.

Hsi-mên wrote a card and sent it, with the sheep and a jar of wine, to Secretary Ts'ui. He told a servant to offer the pig, a jar of wine, and the boxes of cakes to the eunuch. "We are such good friends," Captain Ho said to him, "that really there is no need for you to do anything of the sort."

Wang Ching came to the palace, and was received by Wild Rose in the great hall. She was dressed so exquisitely that she looked like a tree of jade, not at all like the girl who had lived with her mother at Ch'ing Ho. She had grown taller. She asked the boy many questions about her family, and gave him some food. She thought Wang Ching's clothes were very thin. She brought a blue silk gown, lined with fur, and gave it to him with five taels of silver. When the boy got back, he showed the cloak to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

Captain Ho and Hsi-mên were playing chess, when, suddenly, there was shouting outside. The doorkeeper came in and said: "His Lordship Hsia has come to call." He handed one card to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and another to Captain Ho. They hurried to the great hall to meet Hsia. Ho thanked him for the expedition with which he had settled the question of the house. Hsia presented gifts to each of them, and they thanked him cordially. Then he gave ten taels of silver to Pên IV, Tai An, and Wang Ching. They had tea, Hsia asked if he might see the old eunuch, but Ho said:

"His Excellency is at the Palace now." Then Hsia presented a red card.

"Please give my humble respects to his Excellency," he said. "I am sorry I am too late to see him." He took leave of them.

Captain Ho immediately sent him a present in return. It was getting late. Captain Ho entertained Hsi-mên Ch'ing in one of the small rooms in the garden. During the meal, the boys sang for them, and it was the second night-watch before they went to bed.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing had not forgotten what had happened the night before. He told Wang Ching to bring his bed-clothes to the study and sleep there. In the middle of the night the boy went to him. They kissed each other and he found the boy's lips very fragrant.

The next morning, Hsi-mên was up before dawn and joined Captain Ho. They went together to the Palace to wait for the opening of the East Gate. After a while the gates of the Throne Hall were swung open, and they heard the sound of gongs and cymbals. Then the Gate of Heaven was opened, and they caught a glimpse of the most glorious and august diadem. The Son of Heaven was returning from the altar of the south, and all his officers, civil and military, waited to receive him. Gongs were beaten and bells rung, as the Emperor came back to his palace to receive the homage of his officers. Clouds of incense streamed towards the skies. The great ceremonial fans waved to and fro.

His Majesty ascended the throne, and the cracking of whips gave the signal for silence. The officers, holding their tablets of office before their breasts, made five salutations and kotowed three times before the throne, doing homage to the Sacred Majesty.

Then, from the palace, came an officer and spoke the words of the Emperor that all might hear them.

"We have reigned for twenty years," he said, "and at last We have completed the building of the *Kên Chüeh*. Heaven has been Our helper. Now as We enter upon another new year, We pray that the good fortune Heaven has bestowed upon Us, may be shared by you."

There came out from among a group of high officials, one

whose ceremonial boots trod proudly, whose sleeves waved in the breeze. This was Ts'ai Ching, the Chancellor, Minister of the Left, President of the Board of Civil Service, Imperial Tutor and Duke of Lu. Carrying his ivory tablet low before him, he knelt down upon the golden steps.

"May Your Majesty live for ever! In awe and humility, we kotow before the Son of Heaven. As Your Majesty has said, you have governed this Empire for twenty years. During those years the Empire has enjoyed peace and prosperity, and the harvests have been plentiful. Heaven has observed Your Majesty's conduct, appreciated Your Majesty's labours, and given many signs of favour. There has been no war or disturbance upon the frontier, and people from all lands have come to pay tribute before Your Heavenly Throne. Your Majesty's palace is as a mountain of silver towering in the sky, and Your Majesty's capital of jade is unique in all the world.

"The Most Precious and Sacred Will is expressed in Your Majesty's exalted palace; purple candles have been burned in the palace of Heaven. How fortunate are we, that we should live in a world so blessed.

"The relations between Your Majesty and the people are perfect. We pray that You may be spared to live as the mountains, that the light of the sun and the moon may always shine upon us. Your Majesty's graciousness is beyond our power to express: we can only enjoy the blessings that come to us through it. We offer Your Majesty our most humble congratulations and praise."

There was a long delay. Then the Emperor's word was announced to them again.

"You, Our worthy officers, have offered Us your praises. Once again, We appreciate your loyalty and fidelity. We are content. It is Our purpose upon the first day of the New Year to change the title of Our reign to the first year of *Chung Ho*. This We shall duly make known to Heaven. There shall be a general amnesty throughout the Empire, and reward for all those who serve Us."

After listening to this, the Chancellor withdrew.

"It is his Majesty's command," the herald said, "that if anyone has any business to bring forward, he shall do so now. Otherwise his Majesty will retire."

A man stepped out of the crowd, wearing a scarlet gown, with a jade clasp to his girdle, and a golden fish as his badge of office. He lowered his ivory tablet and bowed towards the Emperor, then knelt upon the golden steps.

"Chu Mien, Grand Marshal, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Guard, presents twenty-six magistrates to Your Majesty. Inspection has been made of their work, and the question of their promotion or dismissal determined. They have come to the Capital to obtain their new commissions, and since I dare not myself make the decision, I bring them before Your Majesty and await Your Majesty's command.

The twenty-six magistrates knelt down behind the Grand Marshal.

After a while, the Imperial Decree issued. "Let them be given their commissions in accordance with precedent."

Marshal Chu retired.

The Emperor waved his arms, and the officers withdrew. His Majesty went into the palace.

The officers poured out of the two gates, headed by twelve elephants which marched unattended. The grooms and servants of the Ministers hurried to the service of their masters. There was a crowd of carriages outside the palace gates, and the shouting of the people made a noise like a storm at sea, while the neighing of their horses seemed like an earthquake. The magistrates came out and mounted their horses, and all rode together to their headquarters to wait for orders. A messenger came out to them. "The Grand Marshal," he told them, "will not be here. He is going to celebrate the Winter Festival at the Imperial Tutor's palace." The magistrates dispersed.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing returned to Captain Ho's place and spent another day there. The next day, they went together to their headquarters and secured their documents. Hsi-mên went to say good-bye to Chai, then went back to pack up his luggage, so that he would be ready to return to Ch'ing Ho with Captain Ho.

That evening, the old eunuch entertained them to dinner. He bade his nephew consult Hsi-mên Ch'ing in all things, and not make any decisions for himself.

On the twentieth day of the eleventh month, they set out

for Ch'ing Ho, with more than twenty servants following them. They travelled upon the high road to Shan-tung. It was the season of greatest cold and every drop of water was frozen. They saw nothing but barren hills and deserted paths. Upon the withered trees only the blackbirds sat in the feeble sunshine. Snow and frozen clouds hung above the river. Over one hill they went, and found another one before them. They passed one village, and came to another. When they had crossed the Yellow River and had come to a town on the other side, they were suddenly overtaken by a violent windstorm.

Not this the roaring of the tiger
Or the muttering of the dragon.
The cold air stung their faces; the sharp wind
Pierced their very hearts.
There was at first no sign of its coming
But soon the mist and cloud were swept away.
It rocked the trees and made mad the sea
It hustled the pebbles and urged the stones
And the skies were dark.
The high trees moaned without ceasing
And the lonely goose lay broken in the ditch.
The sand drove across the ground
The dust screened the sky.
The small stones were flung about as in a whirlwind
And the dust was as the dust set up
By millions of soldiers on the march.
This tempest was so violent
It smashed the trees on the frontier of hell
And carried away the dust from the palace
Of the god of the underworld.
Ch'ang O, the angel of the moon,
Shut the doors of her palace in haste.
Lieh Tzū, walking in the skies,
Called out for help.
The Jade Monarch could hardly stay
On the summit of the Koukun Mountains.
Heaven and Earth alike
Were in a mad confusion.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Captain Ho were in sedan-chairs, wrapped in rugs and blankets. The wind was so fearful that they could not advance even a single step. It was late, and

they feared that highwaymen might come out from the woods and attack them. Hsi-mên Ch'ing sent some of his men forward to try to find a shelter for the night, saying that they would go on again when the wind abated. It was some time before a place was found. Then they discovered an old monastery with a few bare willow trees outside it. The walls were half in ruins.

The walls and the memorials were covered with rank grass
The corridors and the ancient sanctuaries were on the point
of falling.

The monks at midnight had no light.

When the moon had set, it made the heart grieve

To see the monks at meditation.

The two officers hastened there. It was called the Temple of the Yellow Dragon. There were only a few monks, engaged in meditation without fire and without light. The rooms were nearly all in ruins, and many of them were patched with boards.

The abbot came to welcome them and made a fire to make them some tea. Hay was brought for their horses. When the tea was ready, Hsi-mên Ch'ing took from his bag preserved chicken, meat, cakes and fruit, and Captain Ho and he made their supper on this food, together with some porridge which the abbot prepared for them. They stayed the night in this place.

The next day, the wind had stopped and the skies were clear. They gave the monks a tael of silver, and set out again.

Chapter Seventy-two

GOLDEN LOTUS QUARRELS WITH HEART'S DELIGHT

They flourish their arms and shrug their shoulders
Sometimes warm and sometimes cold.
Even a eunuch may raise a family
And a stone virgin bring forth a child.
Loss of power is the one thing to escape.
To some, their own children are not so much to be loved
As other people's children.
Father and Mother are not of great account
At any moment their own children
May pass them by.

WHILE Hsi-mên Ch'ing was away, the Moon Lady was a little anxious. There were so many ladies in the household, and she was afraid there might be trouble. She exhorted them all to keep the peace, and made sure that the main gate was closed and the back-door locked, every night. The ladies stayed at home, doing needlework. Whenever Ch'ên Ching-chi had to go to the inner court for clothes or anything, the Moon Lady took care that either Ch'un Hung or Lai An went with him. She was particularly careful about the closing of doors and windows and made quite sure that everything was safe.

Golden Lotus could see nothing of Ching-chi.

One day, the nurse, Heart's Delight, gave her an opportunity to make trouble. The Moon Lady took some of Hsi-mên Ch'ing's clothes, shirts, and underclothes to Heart's Delight, and told her and Madam Han to wash and iron them. Plum Blossom was washing at the same time, and she sent Chrysanthemum to borrow the dolly-pin. Heart's Delight and Welcome Spring were using it, and they would not give it up. "You borrowed it only the other day," Heart's Delight said, "and here you are, after it again. We have all these shirts and clothes of our master's to do while Madam Han is here."

Chrysanthemum, in a very ill humour, went back and said to Plum Blossom: "You are always sending me there to borrow things, and now they won't lend me the dolly-pin."

Welcome Spring was willing enough. It was Heart's Delight who wouldn't do it."

"What's that?" Plum Blossom cried. "Why shouldn't we borrow a lamp in the day-time? She won't lend us a dolly-pin, won't she? Here I am with Mother's foot-binders to wash. What am I going to beat them with? Go to the inner court and borrow one from somebody else."

Golden Lotus was washing her feet in her room. She overheard this. She hated Heart's Delight and was glad of the opportunity to make trouble. "How dare that strumpet refuse to lend us the dolly-pin?" she cried. "Go yourself. And, if she makes any bones about it, curse her well. That ought to settle her."

Plum Blossom dashed away like a whirlwind. "Who is the stranger in this house?" she said, "are you or are we? You refuse to lend me this dolly-pin. That means, I suppose, that there is a new mistress here now."

"If I hadn't been using it," Heart's Delight said, "I shouldn't have kept it."

She got angry in her turn. "The Great Lady," she said, "thought that, with Sister Han here, it was a splendid opportunity to get these shirts and trousers washed. I told Chrysanthemum she could have the dolly-pin as soon as I had finished with it. Then she went and told you I wouldn't lend it to her. It was a lie. Welcome Spring heard what I said."

Golden Lotus came along. "Now, woman," she said, "don't try any tricks on me. Since your mistress died, you have been taking her place in this apartment. You are washing his Lordship's clothes. I suppose you are trying to make out that, if you didn't, nobody else would. We might all be dead, and you the only one to attend to his clothes. I know. You think you will be able to score over the rest of us. But you needn't think you're going to frighten me by games of this sort."

"Fifth Lady," Heart's Delight said, "it is really nothing of the sort. If the Great Lady had not given me orders, you don't think I should have taken it upon myself?"

"You wicked bone," Golden Lotus cried, "you have far too much to say. I ask you: who was it served his Lordship with tea in the middle of the night? Who made his bed for him? Who asked him for a new dress? You think I don't

know the games you play with him on the sly. But I do know, and I'm not afraid to say so."

"My mistress died, even though she had borne a son," Heart's Delight said. "What chance have I against you?"

This made Golden Lotus wild. Her face, which was already red, became redder. She ran forward, caught Heart's Delight by the hair, and thumped her in the belly. Fortunately, Madam Han was there to separate them. Golden Lotus went on cursing. "You shameless strumpet! You husband-stealer! We have been neglected long enough, and now you try to get our husband away from us. What are you doing here at all? Even if you are Lai Wang's wife come to life again, I'm not afraid of you."

Heart's Delight cried. She put her hair straight. "I have not been long in this household," she said. "I don't know anything about Lai Wang's wife. I only know I came here as a nurse."

"If you are a nurse, you should behave as a nurse," Golden Lotus said. "Why do you set the whole place at sixes and sevens like a disturbing spirit? I know what I'm about, and I'll see you don't get away with it."

Tower of Jade came from the inner court. "Sister," she said, "I asked you to play chess with me. Why didn't you come? What is the matter?" She pulled Golden Lotus away to her own room.

When they had sat down, she asked Golden Lotus what was wrong. The woman was now calmer. Plum Blossom brought them tea.

"See!" Golden Lotus said. "That strumpet has made my hands quite cold. I can't lift my cup. I was in my room, making a pattern for my shoes, when your maid came for me. I told her I was going to lie down and rest a while before I came. I lay on the bed, but did not go to sleep. Plum Blossom was washing my skirt, and I told her she might as well wash my foot-binders too. A few moments later, I heard a great to-do, and found that Chrysanthemum had gone to borrow a dolly-pin, and the woman wouldn't lend it to her. She said we had had it the other day, and she wasn't going to lend it to us again because she was washing his Lordship's clothes. That annoyed me, and I told Plum Blossom to go and curse

her. You see, she has been misbehaving herself for some time, and I was determined to teach her a lesson. What sort of a woman does she think she is? His Lordship never married her. She is worse than Lai Wang's wife, and I wasn't going to forgive her. She wouldn't give way, and I gave her a real good cursing. If Madam Han hadn't been there to stop me, I would have pulled the strumpet's guts out. The Great Lady is very much to blame. You remember how she spoiled Lai Wang's wife by being too indulgent. When I had a row with her, all the blame fell upon me. The Great Lady even went so far as to say I was responsible for Lai Wang being kicked out. Now she is dealing with this woman as she dealt with Lai Wang's wife. If the woman is a nurse, let her mind her own business. We are not going to let her carry on before our very eyes. We are not going to have dust thrown in our eyes. The shameless hussy! Her mistress is dead, but she still stays on in that apartment. Every time he comes home, he goes and bows to the portrait and mumbles something or other. Nobody knows what he says. During the night he asks for tea and this strumpet ups and gets it for him. Then she pulls the bed-clothes over him, and they start their tricks. It is the maids' business to serve tea. Why should she take it upon herself? Why did she ask him for a new dress? The shameless fellow went to the shop immediately and got a roll of silk for her. You remember the last week's mind for the Lady of the Vase. He went there to burn some paper things for her. The maid and this strumpet were lying on the same bed, playing knuckle-bones. Did he say a word to stop them? Not he! He said: 'You can have the food and wine which have been offered to the dead lady.' That's how he treats them. One day I overheard the strumpet saying: 'I wonder what is keeping his Lordship so long. We must be ready for him.' I went in, and she was alarmed and didn't say any more. What a woman! The rascally strumpet! But he is so anxious for fresh meat he will take anything that comes along. He never troubles whether it is good or bad. The lustful fellow! The strumpet says her husband is dead; but who was that fellow with a baby in his arms looking round the gate the other day? She is deceiving us. She is like the Lady of the Vase come to life again, quite a changed woman. And the

Great Lady spends all her time in her own room and acts as though she were deaf and dumb. Whenever we go and say anything to her, she says: 'You are mistaken.' "

Tower of Jade could not help laughing. "How do you manage to get all this information?" she said.

"It's common gossip," Golden Lotus said. "Everybody knows it. If you bury a body in the snow, it always turns up again when the snow melts."

"She said her husband was dead," Tower of Jade said. "Who is this husband, then?"

"The clouds never disperse unless there is wind," Golden Lotus said, "and business is never done without telling a lot of lies. She would never have got the job if she hadn't deceived us. You remember what she looked like when she first came. Half starved, yellow faced, as thin as a lath, and her limbs shaking. Now she has enjoyed good food for a couple of years she starts stealing our husband. If we don't put a stop to it, she will have a baby one of these days, and, if that happens, where shall we be? And whose baby would it be?"

"There is something in what you say," Tower of Jade said, laughing. They stayed talking for a while and then went to the inner court to play chess.

One afternoon, Hsi-mên Ch'ing reached Ch'ing Ho. He told Pên IV and Wang Ching to take the luggage home, and went with Captain Ho to the office. He helped to make the necessary arrangements there, then mounted his horse and rode home.

The Moon Lady received him in the hall and gave him water to wash his face. He ordered a maid to set up a table in the courtyard that he might offer incense to Heaven and Earth in thanksgiving for his safe return. The Moon Lady asked him why he did this.

"Oh, it was terrible," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I very nearly lost my life. On the twenty-third, when we had crossed the Yellow River and come to the place called the Town of the Eight Corners, there was a frightful storm. Dust and sand filled our eyes and we could make no progress at all. It was late and for a hundred miles we had not seen a soul. We were alarmed because we had so much luggage and we were afraid

highwaymen might suddenly attack us. Then we came to an old monastery. The monks were so poor that they were going without light. The only thing they could give us was porridge. We spent the night there and started off again the next morning. The wind had stopped. It was a much worse journey than the last one. The last was during the hot season, but it was more agreeable than this, because, not only was the weather terribly cold this time, but we always felt so insecure. It was a good thing for us we were on the plain when the storm arose. If it had come on while we were crossing the Yellow River, I don't know what might have happened. I vowed to offer a pig and a sheep to Heaven and Earth on the first day of the twelfth month."

"Why did you go to the office before you came home?" the Moon Lady asked.

"Magistrate Hsia has been promoted to be an officer of the Imperial Escort," Hsi-mên said. "That is an appointment in the Capital and he is not coming back here. The new captain is Ho Ying-shou, a nephew of Eunuch Ho. He is a boy of about twenty. He is quite ignorant and the old eunuch begged me to look after him. I couldn't leave him to find his own way to the office. He knows nothing about the place. He has bought Hsia's house for twelve hundred taels. I arranged it all for him. He is going to send for his family as soon as Hsia's people have left.

"I can't imagine who told Hsia about these promotions. He sent a large sum of money to his Holiness Lin, and his Holiness told Marshal Chu that he would like to retain his present position for another three years instead of going to the Capital. The Marshal spoke to his Eminence about the matter and it made matters most awkward. If it hadn't been for our kinsman Chai speaking on my behalf, I might have lost my position. Our kinsman was very much annoyed. He said I had been very careless. I can't think who told Magistrate Hsia."

"If you will forgive my saying so," his wife said, "you are indeed careless. Whenever you hear anything, you tell it first to one person and then to another. You like to show people how rich and powerful you are. You carelessly let things slip, and those who hear do not lose the opportunity. Then there

is trouble. People worm secrets out of you and go off and use the information to their own advantage. You never hear about it till they have done all they wish to do."

"When I left Magistrate Hsia," Hsi-mên said, "he begged me repeatedly to do anything I could for his family. We must send them a present and call."

"It will be Mistress Hsia's birthday on the second of next month," the Moon Lady said. "We will go then. As for you, you must be careful. Remember the saying: 'Never let people know more than a quarter of what you know yourself.' Even your own wife may take advantage of you, not to mention other people."

As they were talking, Tai An came and said: "Pên IV would like to know if you are going to his Lordship Hsia's place."

"Tell him to go when he has had something to eat," Hsi-mên said.

Picture of Grace, Tower of Jade, Golden Lotus and Orchid came to welcome him home. They sat down together and talked.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing remembered that the last time he had returned from the Eastern Capital, the Lady of the Vase was still alive. He went to her room, bowed before her tablet and wept. Heart's Delight, Welcome Spring, and Hibiscus came to kotow to him. Then the Moon Lady sent Tiny Jade to ask him to go to dinner in the inner court. He gave orders that those who had accompanied him on his journey should be given five taels of silver.

He sent a card to Major Chou, and told Lai Hsing to get half a pig, half a sheep, forty measures of fine flour, a sack of white rice, a jar of wine, two hams, two geese, ten chickens, and take them, with a supply of condiments, to Captain Ho. He also sent a cook.

He was in the hall when Ch'in T'ung came and said that Scholar Wên and Ying Po-chüeh had come to see him. Hsi-mên Ch'ing ordered the boy to bring them in. They bowed several times and said: "What a rough journey you must have had." Hsi-mên thanked them for looking after his house in his absence.

"This morning, when I awoke," Po-chüeh said, "I heard

the crying of the magpies on the roof, and my wife said to me: 'I expect that means his Lordship Hsi-mên is back. Why don't you go and see?' I said: 'Brother started on the twelfth and he hasn't been away a fortnight yet. How can he be back already?' 'Well,' my wife said, 'whether he is back or not, you must go.' She told me to dress and come, and here you are. I congratulate you."

He saw the wine and rice and other things collected outside the hall. "To whom are you sending these things?" he said.

"I came back with Captain Ho, the new magistrate," Hsi-mên said. "His family has not come yet and he is staying at the office for the time being. I am sending him some provisions. I have invited him to dinner to-morrow and I am going to ask you and Uncle Wu to come too."

"I must remind you," Po-chüeh said, "that Uncle Wu and you are officers. Master Wên wears a scholar's hat. I am only a private person, and it seems hardly fitting that I should join you. I don't know what he may think. He may laugh at me."

"If that's all that is worrying you," Hsi-mên said, laughing, "I will lend you my silk hat, and, when Captain Ho asks who you are, I'll tell him you're my eldest son. Will that suit you?"

They laughed. "I am serious," Po-chüeh said. "My size in hats is eight and three-tenths. Yours won't fit me."

"I take a hat eight and three-tenths too," Scholar Wên said. "Perhaps you would like my scholar's hat!"

"No," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Don't let him have it. When he goes to pawn himself, he might wear it."

"Well said, Sir," Scholar Wên said, "the joke is on both of us."

Tea was brought. "I suppose his Lordship Hsia will stay at the Capital," Scholar Wên said, "or is he coming back here?"

"He is now an officer of the Imperial Escort," Hsi-mên said. "He wears embroidered robes and carries a wand. It is an exalted position and he will not come back."

He looked at the card which was to go with the provisions for Captain Ho, and bade Tai An take them. Then he went with Ying Po-chüeh and Scholar Wên to the side room and

sat down on the stove-bed. He sent Ch'in T'ung to tell Wu Hui, Chêng Ch'un, Chêng Fêng and Tso Shun that they would be wanted the following day. The table was set and they began to drink. Hsi-mên told a servant to get another pair of chop-sticks and invite his son-in-law.

Ch'ên Ching-chi came and sat down with them. They sat near the fire and, while the wine went round, Hsi-mên Ch'ing told them of the dangers he had passed through.

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "you have a heart stout enough to carry you through a hundred dangers. Even if there had been ruffians about, they could not have harmed you."

"If a good man were to govern the country for a hundred years," Scholar Wên said, "he would be able to make evil men into peaceful citizens, and could do away with the punishment of death."¹ You are doing the Emperor's service, and Heaven will not let you come to harm."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked how things had been in the household.

"There was nothing of any consequence," Ching-chi said. "His Excellency An of the Office of Works sent twice to ask if you had returned. Only yesterday a man came from him, and I told him you were not back."

Then P'ing An came and said that the junior officers and their men were outside. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the hall and gave orders that the two officers should be admitted. They came and knelt down. "When will you assume your office?" they asked, "and what money will you require?"

"Let everything be as before," Hsi-mên told them.

"Last year, you were alone," they said, "but now you are promoted to a higher office, and Captain Ho comes to the office also. It is not the same. There are two officers instead of one."

"Take ten taels more, then," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

As the two men were going away, Hsi-mên stopped them. "You had better ask Captain Ho when he wishes to assume office."

"Captain Ho says on the twenty-sixth," they said.

"Very well. See that everything is ready on that day."

When the two junior officers had gone, Master Ch'iao came. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked him to stay, but he went away

¹ A quotation from the *Analects of Confucius*, Book XIII, Chap. 11.

as soon as he had taken tea. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to Ying Po-chüeh and Scholar Wên, and they drank together until evening. That night, Hsi-mên slept with the Moon Lady.

Old woman Wên heard that Hsi-mên had returned. She told Wang III, and he sent a card of invitation to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. In return, Hsi-mên sent Tai An with a pair of pig's trotters, two live fish, two roast ducks and a jar of wine as a belated birthday present to Lady Lin. Lady Lin gave Tai An three ch'ien of silver.

The next day Hsi-mên Ch'ing entertained Captain Ho to dinner. It was laid in the great hall. Very careful preparations had been made. Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh, and Scholar Wên came early and took tea with Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He sent a man to remind Captain Ho. Then the singing-boys came and kotowed to Hsi-mên.

"Why haven't you engaged Li Ming to-day?" Po-chüeh asked.

"If he doesn't come of his own accord, I shall not send for him," Hsi-mên said.

P'ing An brought a card and announced Major Chou. Uncle Wu, Scholar Wên, and Ying Po-chüeh withdrew to a side room while Hsi-mên Ch'ing put on his ceremonial clothes and went to receive Major Chou in the great hall. The Major congratulated Hsi-mên on his promotion, and Hsi-mên thanked him for the men who had acted as his escort on the journey to the Capital. They sat down and Chou asked what he had seen at the Capital and in the Court. When Hsi-mên had told him, he said: "I suppose Hsia will be taking his family to the Capital?"

"Yes," Hsi-mên said, "but not before next month. For the time being, Captain Ho is living at the office, but he has bought Hsia's house. I made the arrangement myself."

"Excellent!" Major Chou said. Seeing the tables all set out, he asked what guests Hsi-mên was expecting.

"It is only a very plain meal in honour of Captain Ho," Hsi-mên said. "It is the least I can do seeing that we are both in the same office."

When Major Chou had drunk his tea, he stood up. "One of these days," he said, "I shall bring the officers of my command to offer you two gentlemen our congratulations."

"You are too kind," Hsi-mên said. "Thank you for troubling to come and see me."

They bowed to each other. Major Chou went away and Hsi-mên Ch'ing rejoined his three friends.

It was late in the afternoon when Captain Ho came. Hsi-mên Ch'ing introduced Uncle Wu and the others and they exchanged greetings. After tea, they took off their ceremonial clothes. Captain Ho soon realised that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was a very rich man, so splendid was the repast served to him. There were four singing-boys playing different instruments. They drank together till the first night-watch, then Captain Ho went back to the office. Uncle Wu, Ying Po-chüeh, and Scholar Wên went away at the same time. Hsi-mên Ch'ing dismissed the singing-boys, told the servants to clear everything away, and went to Golden Lotus's room.

Golden Lotus had taken particular pains to make herself look pretty and she had washed her body with perfumed water. She was expecting him and, when he came, she smiled sweetly. She took his clothes and told Plum Blossom to make tea. They went to bed, and, under the coverlets, embraced and pressed their tender bodies closely together. She used every one of her hundred charms to give him pleasure. They enjoyed each other for a while, then Hsi-mên Ch'ing found that he could not sleep. He told her how he had longed for her while he had been away. Then, as he was still unsatisfied, he asked her to play the flute for him. She was ready to do anything he asked, so that she might the more firmly establish her hold over him. They had been separated for a long time. She had been starved for love so long that passion set her afire. She would have made herself a part of him. *Mentulam prehensam per noctem fere sugere voluit. Meiebat ille sed abire mulier prohibuit. "Voluptas mea," inquit, "quantumcunque meiis os meum capiet. It is chilly to-night and you might take cold if you got out of bed. It would be more trouble."*

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was delighted. "Dearest," he said, "I don't believe anyone else would love me as you do." *In os mulieris meiebat et illa sensim bibebat. "Placetne?" inquit Hsi-mên. "Aliquid acerbi habet!" respondit.*

"Give me some fragrant tea-leaves to take the taste away."

"The tea-leaves are in my white silk coat," Hsi-mên said, "get them for yourself." Golden Lotus pulled the coat to her, took the tea-leaves, and put them into her mouth.

Readers, concubines are always ready to lead their husbands on and to bewitch them. To this end, they will go to any length of shamelessness and endure any shameful thing. Such practices would be abhorrent to a real wife who had married her husband in the proper way.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and Golden Lotus enjoyed ecstasies of pleasure that night.

The next day, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the office with Captain Ho. It was their first appearance in their new posts. There was a banquet, and musicians played for them. In the afternoon Hsi-mên went home and the soldiers of his office sent a present of food. Wang III sent a man to ask him to dinner. Hsi-mên was about to leave for Wang's house, when a servant came and announced the arrival of An, of the Office of Works. Hsi-mên Ch'ing hurriedly put on his robes and went to welcome him.

An, who now held the rank of a Vice-President, wore a girdle with a golden clasp, and a silver pheasant as the badge of his office. He was followed by a host of officers. They entered the hall, smiling, and congratulating one another.

"I have asked several times when you were expected to return," An said, when they had sat down, "but I was told you were not yet back."

"I could not leave the Capital until I had been presented at Court," Hsi-mên said.

"I wanted to ask a favour of you," An said. "Ts'ai Hsiao-t'ang, his Eminence's ninth son, is governor of Chiu-chiang. He is on his way to the Capital and I have had a letter from him to say he will be here very shortly. Sung Sung-ch'üan, Ch'ien Yün-yeh, Huang T'ai-yü and I would like to entertain him. But, for that, we should need your house, and I don't know whether you would be willing to lend it to us or not."

"Certainly you may have it," Hsi-mên said. "When is he coming?"

"On the twenty-seventh," An said. "I will send the necessary money to-morrow. It is extremely kind of you."

They drank tea and Vice-President An went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to Lady Lin's house and sent in his card. Wang III came out to receive him and took him to the great hall. Above the place of honour hung a golden scroll with the words: 'The Hall of Loyalty Continuing.' There were other scrolls on either side. One said, 'The Wind and Frost wear down the mighty Trees', and the other, 'Mountains and Rivers, Girdles and Whetstones are always new'.

Wang III made a reverence to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and asked him to take the place of honour. Tea was brought, and he himself handed it. After tea they talked for a while until dinner was served. Two boys sang to them.

"Will you not ask her Ladyship to come?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

Wang III sent a servant to invite his mother to join them.

Very soon the servant returned. "Her Ladyship asks that you will go to the inner court to see her," he said.

Wang III asked Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go, and Hsi-mên asked Wang III to lead the way. So they went to the hall.

Lady Lin was wearing pearls and ornaments on her head, a scarlet, straight-sleeved gown, and a girdle decorated with gold and green jade. She wore a silken skirt embroidered with the design of the hundred flowers. Her face was powdered till it was as white as silver. Hsi-mên Ch'ing prepared to make a reverence to her and asked her to take the place of honour. "You are my guest," she said. "The place of honour is due to you." Finally, they made equal reverences, and sat down.

"My young son," Lady Lin said, "is very inexperienced. He was unfortunate enough to incur your displeasure but you were generous and punished the fellows who led him astray. I don't know how to thank you. I have prepared this very simple entertainment for you, but I feel that really I should kotow. Why have you sent me presents? I shall feel embarrassed if I accept them, and lacking in courtesy if I decline them."

"I had to go to the Eastern Capital on duty," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I could not come to congratulate you on your birthday. These trifling presents you speak of are really intended for your servants."

Old woman Wên was standing beside Lady Lin. Hsi-mên said to her: "Madam Wên, please give me a cup that I may offer her Ladyship some wine." He called Tai An, who brought a dress of very fashionable style, embroidered with gold. This was put on a tray, and offered to Lady Lin. The dress was so bright that it was dazzling to the eyes. Lady Lin was delighted. Old woman Wên brought gold and silver cups. Wang III was going to send for the boys to sing, but Lady Lin said it would be better if they played outside. When Hsi-mên had offered wine to her, she offered it to him in return. Then Wang III offered wine to him. Hsi-mên would have made a reverence to the young man in return, but Lady Lin said:

"My lord, you must stand and allow him to pay you the respect that is your due."

"I dare not," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "the Rites do not allow it."

"My lord," Lady Lin said, "surely you are wrong. Your rank is now such that you might be his father. My son, in his earlier youth, was very poorly educated. He never associated with gentlemen. If you are well disposed to him, you may, perhaps, be willing to teach him something of the ways of the world. I would even venture to suggest that you might take him under your guardianship and treat him as your son. If he gets into trouble, correct him. I will not stand in your way."

"Lady," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "you speak wisely, but your son is really both intelligent and amiable. He is still young and only on the threshold of life. As he acquires more experience, he will amend his ways. You must not worry about him."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was persuaded to take the place of honour. Wang III offered him three cups of wine and made reverence to him four times. Then Hsi-mên Ch'ing made a reverence to Lady Lin, and she, smilingly, returned it. After this, whenever Wang III was in the presence of Hsi-mên Ch'ing, he called him 'Father'.

After this simple ceremony, Lady Lin bade her son take Hsi-mên Ch'ing to the outer court to take off his ceremonial clothes. Tai An brought a hat and he changed. The two men

sat down and the singing-boys played and sang for them. When the cooks brought in food, Tai An gave them a small present of money. When five courses had been served, and the singers had sung two songs, lights were brought. Hsi-mên Ch'ing stood up to take leave, but Wang III begged him not to go so pressingly that he remained. The young man took him to a small courtyard attached to the study. There were only three rooms, but there were delightful flowers and trees about, and the furniture was very handsome. A golden sign bore the words: 'San-ch'üan's Ship of Poesy.' There were five old pictures on the walls.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked who San-ch'üan was. Wang III was reluctant to tell him, but at last he said: "It is your son's name." Hsi-mên Ch'ing said nothing.

Tall jars were brought. They played darts and drank and the singing-boys sang for them again. Lady Lin, in the inner court, looked after the cooks and servants, sending them with dishes and fruits.

It was the second night-watch before Hsi-mên Ch'ing went away. He was almost tipsy. He distributed money to the cooks and singers, and went home.

When he reached home, he went at once to Golden Lotus's room. She had not gone to bed, but had taken off her head-dress and painted her face very delicately. She had made tea and burned incense in a golden burner. Now she was waiting for him, and when he came, she was delighted. She took his clothes and told Plum Blossom to make him a special cup of Sparrow-Tongue Tea. Plum Blossom helped him to take off his clothes and girdle. He went to bed. Golden Lotus took off her ornaments, put on a pair of bed-shoes, and went to bed too. They lay down together and entwined their legs. Hsi-mên Ch'ing made a pillow of one arm and pressed her close to him with the other. Her body seemed to him as smooth as a piece of soft jade. His breast touched hers; their cheeks were close together. They kissed; their hearts seemed to melt away within them, and they were thrilled to the very centre of their beings.

"My child," Hsi-mên said, "did you ever think of me when I was away?"

"I never forgot you for a single second. The nights seemed

so long. When I lay down I could not sleep. I heated my bed and made it as warm as I could, but I still felt cold, so cold, indeed, that I could not stretch my legs out. I had to suffer and keep them drawn up. I kept thinking you would come, but you never came. Oh, many tears fell upon this pillow. Then dear little Plum Blossom saw how melancholy I was and sighing, and she cheered me as best she could. She used to play chess with me in the evenings. We stayed up till the first night-watch, then went to bed and slept together. That was how I felt, Brother. I wonder how it was with you."

"Little oily mouth," Hsi-mên said, "I have several wives, but, as everyone knows, I love you best."

"No, you are deceiving me," Golden Lotus said. "You are like a boy who takes rice from the bowl but keeps his eyes on the jar all the time. You think I don't know it. Do you remember how you and Lai Wang's wife were as close together as honey and oil mingled? You never thought about me then. The Lady of the Vase had a baby, and you treated me like a black-eyed hen. Now they are gone, and I am still strong and well. You are like a willow catkin blown about by the wind. You have been secretly carrying on with Heart's Delight. You don't seem to care what sort of creature she is. After all, she is only a nurse, and, besides, she has a husband. If you take her on, one of these days her husband will bring all his sheep outside your door. You are an officer now. What are you going to do when the scandal-mongers begin to talk about it? When you were away that woman quarrelled with me, screamed at me, and wouldn't give way an inch. That was when I sent Plum Blossom to borrow a dolly-pin from her."

"Dear, dear!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "It doesn't matter who she is, she must not forget that she is a servant here. I am surprised she had the audacity to quarrel with you. If you raise your hand, it should be a sign to her to pass, and if you lower it, she should know that she is barred from going any farther."

"Oh, you can always talk!" Golden Lotus said. "Now that the Lady of the Vase is dead, Heart's Delight has taken her mistress's place. I suppose you said to her: 'Serve me well,

and you shall have everything that belonged to your mistress.' Did you say that?"

"Don't be so silly. I said nothing of the sort. If you will forgive her, I will make her come and kotow to you to-morrow."

"I don't want her apologies. I forbid you to go to her."

"When I go there to sleep," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I have no other purpose than to remember your dead sister. I go to look at her tablet and I have nothing whatever to do with the woman."

"You are such a liar, I don't believe you," Golden Lotus said. "It is more than a hundred days since the Lady of the Vase died. Why should you go to gaze upon her tablet? You don't go to watch before the tablet, you go to make the place like a miller's grinding place. Before midnight we hear the sound of the bell and, after midnight, the sound of the winnowing."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing pulled her to him and kissed her. "You funny little strumpet," he said, "where did you get such sharp ears?"

He told her to turn over, *et penem a tergo immisit*. *Cruribus mulieris retentis cum fragore se promovit*. "Do you fear me or not?" he cried. "Will you try to control my actions any more?"

"If I didn't," Golden Lotus said, "you would fly off in the air. I know you can't give the woman up, but, if you wish to have her, you must ask my permission, and, if she asks you for anything, you must tell me before you give it to her. I won't have you giving her things without my knowledge. If you do, and I find out, you shall see whether I make trouble or not. I and that strumpet will die together. It is the story of the Lady of the Vase over again. You could think of no one but her, and I was as little to you as the lowest of your women. You rotten peach! You are like bean sprouts which haven't been tied with proper string. But your old mother is too clever for you."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. It was the third night-watch before they were content to put their arms round one another and go to sleep. They slept till nearly dawn.

Before it was light, Golden Lotus, still hungry for more,

fondled his weapon with her slender fingers till it was ready once more for action.

"Darling," she said, "I want to lie on you." She climbed on to him, and played the game of making a candle upside down. She put her arms round his neck and wriggled about. She asked him to grip her firmly by the waist. Then she lifted herself up and dropped herself again; *mox in mulierem penis capulo tenus iniit, nec ulla pars extra manebat nisi quam fibula tenuit.*

"Darling," she said, "I will make a red silk belt for you, and you can keep in it the medicine the monk gave you. And I will make two supports which you can tie at the root of it and fasten round your waist. When they are tightly tied, *mollis erit et totus inibit. Nonne putas id praestare huic fibulae quae tam dura et molesta est?*

"Yes, my child, make it by all means. The medicine is in my little box. Put it in for yourself."

"Come back to-night," Golden Lotus said, "and we will see what it is like."

Tai An came with a card and asked Plum Blossom if his master was out of bed. "His Excellency An," he said, "has sent money, two jars of wine, and four pots of flowers."

"Father is not up yet," Plum Blossom told him. "Ask the man to wait."

"He has a long way to go," Tai An said. "He is on his way to the new wharf."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing overheard this. He asked what was the matter, and the card was brought to him. Upon it was written: 'I send you eight taels for the refreshment of Hsiao-t'ang. The food for the others may be what is customary. I trust you will instruct your servants to make careful preparations, and thank you for your kindness. I send you also four pots with seasonable flowers in the hope that you will like them. The two jars of wine may, perhaps, serve for the entertainment of the guests. Please accept them indulgently.'

Hsi-mên Ch'ing got up. He did not dress his hair but, putting on a felt hat and a gown, went to the hall. He sent for his Excellency's messenger. The man presented the silver and the pots of flowers. One contained red plum, another white plum, the third jasmine and the fourth, magnolia. And there

were two jars of southern wine. Hsi-mên was very pleased. He gave the man a card in return and five ch'iens of silver for himself.

"When will the gentlemen arrive?" he asked. "Will it be necessary to engage actors?"

"Their Excellencies will be early," the man said. "They would like to have the Hai Yen company." He went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told the servants to take the flowers to his study and sent Tai An to engage the actors. As it was Tower of Jade's birthday, he arranged for them to come in the evening also. Lai An was sent to buy provisions.

We now return to Ying Po-chüeh. On the twenty-eighth day of the month, his baby would be one month old, and there was to be a celebration. He took five cards and sent Ying Pao with a box to the house opposite Hsi-mên Ch'ing's. He was going to ask Scholar Wên to write invitations to Hsi-mên's five ladies.

He had left his own house and turned into the street when he heard a voice behind him calling: "Uncle! Uncle!" It was Li Ming. Po-chüeh stopped and Li Ming asked where he was going.

"I am going to see Scholar Wên on business," Po-chüeh said.

"I was just coming to see you," Li Ming said. "There is something I want to tell you."

Ying Po-chüeh saw a porter carrying a box behind Li Ming, and he took Li Ming to his house. The boy kotowed to him and presented the box. There were two roast ducks and two bottles of spirits in it.

"I have nothing but these trifles to offer you," Li Ming said, "but I should like to ask your help." He knelt down and could not be persuaded to rise. Po-chüeh finally pulled him up.

"You silly boy. If you have anything to say, say it. There was no need for you to bring these presents."

"I have served his Lordship Hsi-mên ever since I was a little boy," Li Ming said. "Now he is giving his patronage to others and leaving me out in the cold. I have nothing to do with Cassia's affairs. We are not in the same boat. His Lordship is angry with her, and he seems to be angry with me too."

I have had no opportunity to explain matters. So I have come to you. I beg you to go and speak for me. Tell him that I had nothing to do with Cassia's naughty behaviour. Since I have incurred his displeasure all the boys in my business make fun of me."

"You haven't been to his place for a long time," Po-chüeh said.

"No," the boy said.

"That explains why, the other day, when Captain Ho was at his place, I only saw Wu Hui, Chêng Ch'un, Chêng Fêng and Tso Shun. You were not there, and I asked why. His Lordship told me that you never came near the place and he wasn't going to send for you. Now, you silly boy, pull yourself together and don't be such a blockhead."

"When he didn't send for me," Li Ming said, "I felt too shy to go of my own accord. The other four were there two or three days ago and, to-day, I find Lai An is engaging two of them for the Third Lady's birthday. There is a party to-morrow and the four boys will be there again without me. I am very miserable about it. Uncle, I want you to explain matters for me. I will come and kotow to you again."

"I spend all my time helping others," Po-chüeh said, "and I will do the best I can for you. I have done many, many things for people, and this trifling business of yours is nothing at all. Take these presents away. I know how you get your money, and I won't take them. Come with me and let me make everything all right."

"I will not go unless you accept my present," Li Ming said. "You do not need the things, of course, but I am anxious to show my humble respect for you."

He implored Ying Po-chüeh to take them, and, at last, Po-chüeh did so. He gave thirty coppers to the porter who had carried the box. Then they set out together. They went first to the house opposite Hsi-mên Ch'ing's. They went into the courtyard. Po-chüeh knocked at the door and asked if Scholar Wên was at home. The scholar was in the study, writing a card. "Please come in," he cried. Hua T'ung opened the door and Po-chüeh went into the study. Scholar Wên greeted him. They sat down and the scholar said: "You are early to-day. What have you been doing?"

"I have come to ask you to write a few invitations with your masterly brush. It will be the end of my little son's first month of life on the twenty-eighth, and I am inviting his Lordship's ladies."

"Give me the cards," Scholar Wên said, "I will write them for you with pleasure."

Po-chüeh told Ying Pao to take out the cards and give them to Scholar Wên. The scholar took them to the inner room and had written two when Ch'i T'ung came hurrying in and said: "Master, please write another two cards for my lady. She wishes to invite Mistress Ch'iao and Mistress Wu. Did you give Ch'in T'ung the cards for Mistress Han and Mistress Mêng?"

"Yes," Scholar Wên said, "they were sent off some time ago."

"Master," Ch'i T'ung said, "when you have finished those two cards, please write another four. They are for Mistress Huang IV, Mistress Fu, Mistress Han, and Mistress Kan. Lai An will come for them."

Ch'i T'ung went away and Lai An came for the four cards. Po-chüeh said to him: "Is your master at home or at the office?"

"He has not been to the office to-day," Lai An said, "he is in the hall receiving presents."

"It was very late when his Lordship came back from Wang's place last night," Scholar Wên said.

"Which Wang's?" Po-chüeh asked.

"The general's," Scholar Wên told him.

This was the first Ying Po-chüeh had heard of this business.

When Scholar Wên had finished the cards for Lai An, he began again on those for Ying Po-chüeh. When they were done, Po-chüeh went across the road to Hsi-mên's house with Li Ming.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing's hair was still undressed. He was in the hall, accepting presents and sending cards in return. Tables were being set out for the reception. He asked Po-chüeh to sit down. Po-chüeh thanked him for the gifts he had sent some days before and asked why the tables were being arranged. Hsi-mên told him that his Excellency An was making use of the house for a reception to the Imperial Tutor's son.

"Are you having actors or singing-boys?" Po-chüeh asked.

"We are having the Hai Yen company of actors," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "but I have engaged four singing-boys as well."

"Who are they, Brother?" Po-chüeh asked.

"Wu Hui, Chêng Fêng, Chêng Ch'un and Tso Shun," Hsi-mên said.

"Why not Li Ming?"

"He has climbed too high to care about my patronage any more," Hsi-mên said.

"Why should you say that, Brother?" Po-chüeh said. "He can hardly come if you don't send for him. I didn't know you were angry with him. And the business for which you are angry with him is really not his concern at all. He can't help what happens at the bawdy-house. We must not be unfair to him. This morning he called at my house and said, with tears in his eyes, that, apart from the relations which have existed between you and his sister, he has served you himself for several years. Now, he says, you send for the others and will have nothing to do with him. He swore on his oath that he had nothing to do with that business at the house. If you are angry with him, it will be very awkward indeed for him. He is only a boy. He can't earn a great amount of money and, if you stop sending for him, his position will be impossible."

"Li Ming, come here!" he called. "Tell your father all about it. Why are you hiding there? Come here, I tell you. Even an ugly bride must meet her father-in-law sometime."

Li Ming was standing outside the hall. He bowed and then stood upright, like the image of a little devil. He had been listening to what they were saying and, when Po-chüeh called him, he came in quickly and knelt down. He kotowed repeatedly.

"Father," he said, "you must think about this again. If I had anything to do with that business, may my bones be broken to pieces by horses or carts, and may I die at the hand of the executioner. Your kindness to me in the past has always been so splendid. My people and I can never repay you. If you are angry with me, the others in my profession will laugh at me and look down on me. I can never find another master like you."

He cried aloud, knelt on the floor, and would not get up.

"We must settle this," Po-chüeh said. "A gentleman never holds a lesser man's faults against him. Besides, it wasn't his fault and, even if it had been, you would have to forgive him now that he comes to apologise." He said to Li Ming: "I am wearing black clothes so I have to stand near a black pillar. Now you have spoken to your father, I am sure he won't be angry with you any more. But, in future, you must take care."

"Yes, Uncle," Li Ming said, "I will amend my ways."

"Since your uncle asks me to forgive you I will do so," Hsi-mên said slowly. "Stand up."

"Kotow," Po-chüeh said.

Li Ming kotowed and rose to his feet.

Ying Po-chüeh asked Ying Pao for the cards of invitation and gave them to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "It will be my baby's month-day on the twenty-eighth," he said. "I am inviting my sisters-in-law to my humble dwelling."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing looked at the cards, and told Lai An to take them with the box to the Moon Lady. "I don't think they will be able to come that day," he said. "To-morrow is the Third Lady's birthday, and there is this reception as well. On the twenty-eighth, my wife is going to call on Mistress Hsia. I don't see how she can manage to come to your place."

"Brother," Po-chüeh said, "would you seek my death? If my sister-in-law won't go, whom else can I count upon? Since the fruits are in the garden, I will go myself and ask them."

But Lai An came in with the box empty. "The Great Lady says I am to tell Uncle Ying she accepts his kind invitation."

Po-chüeh gave the empty box to Ying Pao. "Brother," he said, laughing, "you are always making game of me. If my sister-in-law had really refused to come, I would have bashed my head against the wall, and she would have been compelled to give way."

"Stay till I have done my hair," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Po-chüeh, "and we will have something to eat." He went to the inner court.

"Now what?" Po-chüeh said to Li Ming. "If it hadn't been for me he would not have forgiven you. Don't mind what he says. Wealthy people are always bad-tempered, but you mustn't forget the proverb: 'An angry fist will never smite

a smiling face.' In these days, people like to be flattered. Even if you have money and set yourself up in business, you have always to be agreeable to your customers. If you pull a long face, nobody will bother about you. What you have to do is to fit yourself to circumstances and make yourself as adaptable as running water. Then you will make money. If you always try to ride the high horse, others will get good food but you will starve. You have served his Lordship for a long time but you don't understand him yet. Tell Cassia to come to-morrow. If she is hot upon your heels, she will kill two birds with one stone. It is the Third Lady's birthday. She can come to congratulate her and apologise to him at the same time. Then everything will be well."

"Uncle," Li Ming said, "you are right. I will go home at once and tell my aunt."

Lai An came in to set the table. "Uncle Ying," he said, "if you will wait a few moments, Father will be here."

Soon Hsi-mên came in, properly dressed. They sat down.

"I haven't seen old Sun and Pock-marked Chu for a long time," Hsi-mên said.

"I told them to come," Po-chüeh said, "but they declared you were offended with them. I told them that, thanks to your generosity, when the mosquitos and grasshoppers were brought before the court, they were allowed to escape. They swore to me they would never have anything to do with young master Wang again. I hear you were at Wang's place yesterday. I hadn't known of it before."

"Yes," Hsi-mên said. "There was a little party and I was invited. I was asked if I would take the young man under my protection and treat him as a son. I didn't get back until the second night-watch. Why shouldn't they go there any more? They can go if they like. It won't worry me. Why should I bother about the young man? I'm not really his father."

"If you mean what you say, Brother," Po-chüeh said, "I am sure they will come to apologise and explain the whole business."

"There is nothing for them to apologise about," Hsi-mên said. "Tell them to come, that's all."

Tai An brought the food. There were all sorts of delicious things. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had porridge, and Po-chüeh, rice.

"Why haven't the two singing-boys come yet?" Hsi-mên asked.

"They are here," Lai An said.

"Go and have something to eat with them," Hsi-mên said to Li Ming. One was Han Tso, the other Shao Ch'ien. They came and kotowed before Hsi-mên Ch'ing, then went to have their dinner. Before long, Ying Po-chüeh stood up. "I must be going now," he said, "I expect my people are waiting anxiously for me. In humble families like ours, it is very hard to get anything done. We have to buy everything. Buy, buy, buy from the bottom of the cooking-stove to the sitting-room door."

"Go and do what you have to do," Hsi-mên said, "and come back this evening to kotow to the Third Lady and show what a good son you are."

"I will certainly come," Po-chüeh said, "and my wife will send some presents." He went away.

Chapter Seventy-three

· CHRYSANTHEMUM IN TROUBLE

I was called a great lover
I remembered my love.
He who called me a great lover and accepted my love
That man despised me.
Because I am a great lover
My love grows ever deeper and stronger
If I die of love I shall not complain
My love shall be ever steadfast.

WHEN Ying Po-chüeh had gone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Cave of Spring to watch the masons putting in a warm bed. It was heated by a furnace outside the wall, so that the flowers should not be spoiled by the smoke.

P'ing An brought him a card and told him that Major Chou had sent a present. There was a box with five separate contributions from Major Chou himself, General Ching, Captain Chang, and the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh. Each of them sent five *hsing* and two handkerchiefs. Hsi-mên told a servant to accept the things, and gave a card to the man who had brought them.

Aunt Yang, Aunt Wu and old woman P'an came early. Nun Hsüeh, Nun Wang, the two novices, Miao Ch'ü and Miao Fêng, and Miss Yü, came with gifts for Tower of Jade. The Moon Lady gave them tea in her own room. The ladies were all there to welcome the guests but, after tea, they went to their own rooms.

Golden Lotus was eager to make the red silk belt she had promised Hsi-mên Ch'ing. She went to her room and brought out her sewing-box. From it she took a piece of red sarsenet. Then, from a porcelain box, she took some of the aphrodisiac drug and sewed it, with fine delicate stitches, into the material. Everything was now ready for the work of darkness. Suddenly, Nun Hsüeh came to the door. She had brought Golden Lotus the potion she was to take to make her conceive. They sat down to talk. Nun Hsüeh saw that nobody was about.

"Wait until a *féu Tzū* day," she whispered. "Then take it

before you have anything to eat. That night, sleep with your husband and you will conceive without fail. The Great Lady has a big belly. It was I who gave her the medicine. And I will tell you something else. Make yourself a little bag and I will give you a spell written in red ink to put in it. Carry it on your body, and you will bear a son. You have my word for that. It has never been known to fail."

Golden Lotus was delighted. She put the medicine and the charm into a box. Then she consulted a calendar. The next *Jên Tzu* day was the twenty-ninth. She gave the nun three ch'ien of silver. "This is very little," she said, "it will buy you some vegetarian food. But when I have a baby I will give you some silk to make clothes with."

"Don't trouble about that," the nun said, "I am not so greedy as Nun Wang. You remember when I held that service for the dead lady. She said I had done her out of it, and quarrelled with me. Now, she never meets me without saying something horrid. But she can go to Hell. I am not going to argue with her. My only aim in life is to do all the good I can and save people from misfortune."

"Do the best you can," Golden Lotus said. "We can't expect everybody to be as kind as we are. Don't mention this business to her."

"Oh, I shall say nothing about it," Hsüeh said. "It shall be a secret between ourselves. Last year, when I did this for the Great Lady, Wang said I had been too well paid, and nagged at me until I gave her half I got. A fine god-fearing creature she is! She never fasts, and she is far too fond of money. She takes alms from everybody and never does anything in return. When she dies and is born again, she will be something worse than a horned animal. I'm sure of it."

Golden Lotus told Plum Blossom to give the nun some tea. When she had drunk it she went to the Lady of the Vase's room to pay her respects to the tablet. Then she went back to the inner court.

In the afternoon, the Moon Lady had tables laid in her room and invited all the ladies and the nuns. She also had a table set in the middle room and a fire lighted, so that they could drink wine there in honour of Tower of Jade's birthday.

The wine was poured into jade cups. Tower of Jade, herself

like a jade statue, raised a cup aloft. She offered it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. Then she made a reverence to each of the other ladies in turn. Ching-chi and his wife were there. They greeted her. They all sat down, and special birthday dishes were brought in. While they were drinking, Lai An came in with a box and said Ying Pao had brought presents. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked the Moon Lady to accept them. He told Lai An to get an invitation card written for Mistress Ying, and to invite Ying Po-chüeh and Uncle Wu to come also.

"I know Mistress Ying will not come," he said, "so we had better ask Uncle Ying. We will send presents in return another day." Lai An gave Ying Pao a card, and the boy went home.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing remembered Tower of Jade's last birthday, when the Lady of the Vase was still alive. Now, all the other ladies were there, but she was gone. The thought grieved him and he shed tears.

Li Ming and the other two boys came in. "Can you sing the song of the lovebirds?" the Moon Lady asked them. Han Tso said he knew it, took up his instrument and was going to sing, but Hsi-mên Ch'ing stopped him.

"No," he said. "Sing: 'I remember the flute-playing.'" The boys changed the tune and sang: 'I remember the flute-playing. Where is that exquisite creature now?' They went on till they came to the line: 'For me she took off her silken skirt. There was blood on the red azalea flower.'

Golden Lotus knew that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was thinking about the Lady of the Vase and, when this line was sung, she deliberately teased him.

"My son," she said, "you are like Chu Pa-chieh sitting in a butcher's shop without a fire. No one could look as sour as you do. She wasn't a virgin: she was a married woman. Why do you think of the blood on the red azalea in connection with her? That is going too far. You are a shameless piece of goods."

"Listen to the song, you slave. I wasn't thinking anything of the sort."

The two boys sang: 'The love-sick maiden in the palace made up her mind to run away. But how shall I do so? I must gather the flowers upon the walls.'

Hsi-mên Ch'ing listened with bowed head. When the song was over, Golden Lotus was so jealous she could not leave him alone. They began to bicker. The Moon Lady would not have this. "Sister," she said, "be silent. What are you squabbling about? Aunt Yang and my sister-in-law are in the other room with nobody to keep them company. Perhaps two of you will go and join them. I will come myself in a few moments."

Golden Lotus and Picture of Grace went to the inner room.

Lai An came back. "I took the card to Mistress Ying," he said. "Uncle Ying and Uncle Wu are coming."

"Go and fetch Master Wên," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to him. He said to the Moon Lady: "Tell the cooks to bring food to the outer court. I will take my friends there."

Then, with Li Ming, he went to the room in the eastern wing. Po-chüeh was waiting for him. Hsi-mên thanked him for his presents and told him he must let Mistress Ying come the following day.

"I'm afraid she won't be able to come," Po-chüeh said. "There is nobody she can leave behind to look after the house."

Master Wên came in. Po-chüeh bowed to him and said: "I am afraid I was a great trouble to you this morning."

"Not at all," Master Wên said. "It was a pleasure."

Uncle Wu came and sat down. Ch'in T'ung brought lights and they all sat round the fire. Lai An brought wine and cups and set them on the table.

Ying Po-chüeh noticed that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was wearing a dark green silken gown with a dragon in five colours embroidered upon it, over his white jacket. The dragon's claws were outstretched and it showed its teeth. The head and horns were noble and impressive. The whiskers were bristling and the hair stood on end. The gold and green seemed alive and the dragon was coiled around Hsi-mên Ch'ing's body. Po-chüeh was almost startled.

"Where did you get that gown?" he said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing stood up. "Look at it," he said. "Can you guess where it came from?"

"I have no idea," Po-chüeh said.

"Eunuch Ho of the Eastern Capital gave it to me," Hsi-mên

said. "I was drinking with him one very cold day and he gave it to me then. It is, as you see, a flying dragon. The Emperor had given him another, and he had no further use for this. But it was a great honour to me."

"It must be worth some money," Po-chüeh said. "Brother, it is a good omen. One of these days, you will become governor of a province and wear a dragon robe and a jade girdle. You will go a long way yet."

Ch'in T'ung warmed wine and set the cups before them. Li Ming sang.

"I must go and offer a cup of wine to your Third Lady," Ying Po-chüeh said. "Then I'll come back and join you."

"My son," Hsi-mên said to him, "if you have such a sense of filial devotion, go, and don't talk so much about it."

"I wouldn't mind going and kotowing to her," Po-chüeh said, "if the others wouldn't be jealous. But, as a matter of fact, it wouldn't do for me to kowtow to her, because I am the one in authority here. You must go and do it for me."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing tapped him on the head. "You dog," he said, "what do you care about authority?"

"I care a great deal," Po-chüeh said. "Haven't you just hit me on the head?"

They laughed and joked together. Ch'in T'ung brought them some birthday noodles. Hsi-mên Ch'ing pressed them to set to, and went to eat his own with the ladies in the inner court. Li Ming had something to eat too, then came back to sing for them again. Ying Po-chüeh asked Uncle Wu to tell him what to sing.

"I will be kind to him," Uncle Wu said. "He may sing anything he knows."

"Uncle Wu is very fond of 'The Earthen Jar'," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He told Ch'in T'ung to fill up the cups. Li Ming tuned his instrument and sang: 'She looked out over the countryside, and spoke no word. All day she stood there, and her lovely face grew sad.' Then Li Ming withdrew.

Lai An came and said: "In the kitchen they want to know how many cooks you will need to-morrow."

"Six cooks and two scullions," Hsi-mên said. "We must have five specially good courses."

Lai An went away.

"Who will be your guests to-morrow?" Uncle Wu said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing told him that Vice-President An had invited the Imperial Tutor's ninth son.

"I am glad his Excellency will be taking wine here," Uncle Wu said.

"Why?"

"Because of that old business of the granary," Wu said. "My work is controlled by his Excellency's department. I should be glad if you would ask him to look indulgently on me, and tell him that I hope he will speak well of my work when the inspection is over. I shall be very much obliged to you."

"Let me have your record of service," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I will speak to him for you."

Uncle Wu rose and bowed to Hsi-mên.

"You ought to be satisfied," Po-chüeh said to him. "His Lordship wouldn't do it for anybody but you. But, after all, if he doesn't look after your interests, whom will he bother about? A little effort on his part and, I'm sure, everything will turn out well."

They went on drinking until the second night-watch. When Li Ming was about to go away, Hsi-mên told him to come the following day. Li Ming went out. The boys cleared everything away. When the ladies in the Moon Lady's room heard that the guests in the outer court had gone, they went to their own apartments.

Golden Lotus expected Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go to her room and hurried there but, as she reached the second door, she saw Hsi-mên Ch'ing going towards the Moon Lady's room. She hid herself behind the shadow wall and watched him pass. Then she went quietly after him. Flute of Jade was standing at the door.

"Why haven't you gone to your room, Fifth Mother?" she said. "Where is Grandmother?"

"Oh, that old thing has a pain," Golden Lotus said, "she has gone to bed."

She heard the Moon Lady say: "What made you send for those two new boys? They are no use at all. They sing the same old tune over and over again."

"When you told them to sing 'The Lotus Pool', they were

not so bad," Tower of Jade said. "What are the little turtles called? They did nothing but play about all the time they were here."

"One is Han Tso, and the other Shao Ch'ien," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"They might call themselves by any name," the Moon Lady said. "We know nothing whatever about them."

Golden Lotus tiptoed into the room, and stood behind the bed. Suddenly she said: "Sister, you told them to sing a song. He stopped them and told them to sing 'I remember the flute-playing'. That confused the little turtles. They didn't know whom to obey."

Tower of Jade turned round quickly. "Where have you come from?" she said. "You gave me a fright, speaking suddenly like that. You might have been a ghost. How long have you been there?"

"The Fifth Lady has been standing behind you a long time," Tiny Jade said.

Golden Lotus nodded her head. "My son," she said, "don't think yourself so clever. You always flatter yourself that nobody sees through your little tricks. What right had you to compare her to a virgin in the palace? She and I were both in the same boat; we had both been married before. How could she take off her skirt for you, so that you saw the blood upon the red azalea? I should like to know how you would prove that. I can put up with a good deal, but this is too much. You told your friends that, since she died, you have never been able to enjoy your favourite dishes. Now that Butcher Wang is dead, you have to eat your pork with the hair on. Have you had nothing but dung to eat? You regard us as beneath contempt. We don't mind that. But the Great Lady manages the household for you, and you pay no heed to her. She who is dead is the only one worth thinking about. Why didn't you save her when she was dying? How did you live before you met her? Now everything is wrong. Whenever her name is mentioned, you are upset. But you have taken someone to fill her place and, what's more, you seem very glad of the chance. It looks as though the only water fit to be drunk in this house comes from her room."

"Sister," the Moon Lady said, "the good are short-lived;

the wicked live a thousand years. If you have not a lathe to turn a ball you must shape it with a chisel. Since we are dull and don't suit him, he must do as he pleases."

"I don't want to be nasty," Golden Lotus said, "but the things he says are so hurtful. I can't let them go by."

"When did I say anything of the sort, you little strumpet?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing.

"The day you entertained his Grace Huang," Golden Lotus answered, "you were talking to Ying II and Scholar Wên. If she were here, you wouldn't care if the rest of us died to-morrow. You had better marry somebody to take her place, you rascally scamp."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing jumped up and kicked her. She ran away as quickly as she could. Hsi-mên followed her, but when he reached the door she had disappeared. Plum Blossom was there. He put his hand on the maid's shoulder and went back to the inner court.

The Moon Lady saw that he was drunk and was anxious to get rid of him because she wished to listen to the nuns. She told Tiny Jade to take a light and take him away. Golden Lotus and Flute of Jade were standing in a dark passage and Hsi-mên Ch'ing passed them without seeing them.

"Father seems to be going to your room," Flute of Jade said.

"Yes, he is drunk. He can go to bed. I am in no hurry."

"Mother, wait here a moment for me," Flute of Jade said, "I am going to get some fruit for you to give the old lady." She brought the fruit. Golden Lotus put it in her sleeve, and went to her room. On the way, she met Tiny Jade, coming back.

"Father is looking for you," the maid said.

Golden Lotus came to her door but did not go in. She peeped through the window. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was on the bed amusing himself with Plum Blossom. She did not wish to disturb them, so she went round to the other room and gave the fruit to Chrysanthemum. She asked whether old woman P'an was in bed, and the maid told her she had been asleep for a long time. Golden Lotus bade her put the fruit away and went back to the inner court. The ladies were all assembled,

Nun Hsüeh was sitting on the bed, and incense was burning on a small table. They were listening with great attention to the nun's words.

Golden Lotus came in suddenly, smiling.

"You have had trouble already," the Moon Lady said to her. "He has gone to your room. Why have you come back here instead of seeing that he gets to sleep? I am very much afraid he will beat you."

"Do you think he dare?" Golden Lotus said, smiling.

"You talked to him too roughly," the Moon Lady said. "He was drunk and, if he had got into a rage, he would certainly have beaten you. We were all very anxious. You really are naughty."

"I am not afraid of him, even when he is in a temper," Golden Lotus said. "And what a performance! You told the boys to sing one song. He stopped them and told them to sing another to suit himself. It is the Third Lady's birthday and not the time for songs of that sort. The dead are dead. He is always trying to show how much he thought about her, and I don't like it."

"What is the matter, ladies?" Aunt Wu said. "I don't understand. His Lordship came in and suddenly went out again."

"Sister," the Moon Lady said, "you don't understand. He remembered that, on the Third Lady's last birthday, the Lady of the Vase was still alive. He cried because she was not here to-day. He told the boys to sing: 'I remember the flute-playing.' The Fifth Lady didn't like it and began an argument with him. He flew into a temper and kicked her. Then she ran away."

"Lady," Aunt Yang said, "you should let your husband do what he pleases. What is the use of arguing with him? I can understand how sad he must have felt at the Sixth Lady's death, after you had all been so long together."

"We should never have thought of complaining about the song," Tower of Jade said, "but Golden Lotus knows all the allusions. She realised that, when he picked out that particular one, he wished to praise her who is dead, and even went so far as to compare her with an historical personage. The song describes their loves, and tells how they lived for one another."

It was too much for the Fifth Lady and she quarrelled with him. That caused all the trouble."

"How clever you are, Sister," Aunt Yang said to Golden Lotus.

"There are no songs she doesn't know," the Moon Lady said. "Give her the first line and she can always tell you the last. Whenever my husband calls for a song, there is always trouble. She knows what is in his mind. She often makes him angry."

"Of all my children," Tower of Jade said, jokingly, "this is the only one who has any brains."

"I make trouble for everybody," Golden Lotus said, laughing, "and now you laugh at me."

"Sister," Aunt Yang said, "you must let your husband have his own way. The proverb says: One night of married bliss, and love stays for a hundred nights. Even if husband and wife live together only a short time, they must love one another. When the Sixth Lady died so suddenly, it must have seemed to him as though he had lost one of his fingers. It is only natural that he should grieve when he thinks about her."

"Let him think about her, by all means," Golden Lotus said, "but with moderation. We are all his ladies. He ought not to exalt one and treat the rest of us like dirt. He was angry because we didn't wear mourning for her long enough. We did so for fifty days. Why shouldn't that have been enough?"

"You must not be too hard on him," Aunt Yang said.

"How quickly time flies," Aunt Wu said. "It must be nearly a hundred days since she died."

"When is the hundredth day?" Aunt Yang said.

"The twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month," the Moon Lady said.

"We ought to have a service for her," Nun Wang said.

"We can't have a service every time," the Moon Lady said.

"Perhaps we will have one on New Year's Day."

Tiny Jade brought tea and gave each of them a cup. When they had drunk it, the Moon Lady washed her hands and burned incense. Nun Hsüeh preached to them again. After some opening verses, she told them how the holy man, Wu Chieh, broke his vows and fell in love with Hung Lien, and

how, in a later life, he became Tung P'o. She went on for a long time.

Fragrance brought two boxes of vegetarian food and cakes. She took the incense-burner from the table and put down the food and a pot of tea. The nuns had this, then the maid brought food and a jar of wine for the other ladies as they sat around the fire.

The Moon Lady cast dice with her sister-in-law, and Golden Lotus guessed fingers with Picture of Grace. Flute of Jade stood behind Golden Lotus's chair to serve the wine and, at the same time, suggested how she should play. Picture of Grace was beaten.

"I will guess fingers with her now," Tower of Jade said. "She seems to win all the time. But I won't have her putting her fingers in her sleeves, or Flute of Jade standing behind her, either."

Golden Lotus was beaten and was made to drink several cups of wine. She went to her room. She had to knock at the corner gate for a long time before Chrysanthemum, rubbing her eyes, came to open it.

"You have been to bed, you slave," Golden Lotus said.

"No," said Chrysanthemum.

"You are lying, you have only just this moment got up. What an idle good-for-nothing you are! You didn't even come to meet me. Has your father gone to bed?"

"He has been in bed a long time," Chrysanthemum said.

Golden Lotus went to the inner room, pulled up her skirts, and warmed herself at the fire. Then she demanded tea. Chrysanthemum hastily poured out a cup for her.

"Your hands are dirty and I don't want stewed tea. Go and tell Plum Blossom to get the small kettle and boil some fresh water. Put some more tea-leaves in the pot and make it strong."

"Plum Blossom has gone to bed. Shall I wake her?"

"No, don't disturb her. Let her sleep."

Chrysanthemum went in. Plum Blossom was sleeping at Hsi-mên Ch'ing's feet. Chrysanthemum woke her up. "Mother has come," she said. "She wants some tea. Get up at once."

Plum Blossom spat at her and cursed her.

"You slave! What do you mean by coming here and startling me like that? 'Mother has come', indeed! Well, what about it?"

She got up, however, and slowly dressed herself. Then she went to Golden Lotus and stood, rubbing her eyes. Golden Lotus scolded Chrysanthemum.

"You saw she was asleep, you slave. Why did you wake her?" Then she said to Plum Blossom: "The kerchief on your head is rumpled. Pull it down a little. And what have you done with the other ear-ring?"

Plum Blossom looked at herself and saw that one of her ear-rings had gone. She took a light and went into the other room to look for it. After searching a long time, she found it on the footstool.

"Where did you find it?" Golden Lotus asked.

"It was Chrysanthemum's fault," Plum Blossom said. "She woke me up suddenly and my ear-ring caught in the curtain hook. I found it on the footstool."

"I told her not to wake you," Golden Lotus said, "but she didn't pay any attention."

"She said you wanted some tea."

"I wouldn't let her make it. She has such dirty hands."

Plum Blossom filled the small kettle and put it on the fire. She put coal on the brazier, and the water was soon boiling. She washed a cup, made some very strong tea, and gave it to her mistress.

"Has your father been in bed long?" Golden Lotus asked.

"Yes, I helped him to bed a long time ago. He asked where you were, and I told him you were still in the inner court."

Golden Lotus drank her tea. "Flute of Jade gave me some fruits and things for my mother. I gave them to this slave. Did she hand them over to you?"

"No, I haven't seen them. I have no idea what she's done with them."

"Where are the fruits?" Golden Lotus said to Chrysanthemum.

"I put them in the cupboard," the maid said. She went and brought them. Golden Lotus counted them and found that an orange was missing. She asked what had become of it.

"I took them and put them in the cupboard just as you gave them to me," Chrysanthemum said. "Surely you don't think I was so near starvation I had to go and eat it."

"You thief!" Golden Lotus cried. "You are far too cheeky."

If you haven't stolen it, where is it? When I gave them to you, I counted them. Why is there one short? Did you think I brought them for you?"

She turned to Plum Blossom. "Give her ten slaps on each side of her face."

"I should soil my hands if I touched those dirty cheeks," Plum Blossom said.

"Send her to me, then," Golden Lotus said.

Plum Blossom pushed the girl to her mistress and Golden Lotus pinched her cheeks.

"Did you eat that orange, you thief? Tell me the truth and I will let you off. Otherwise, I will get the whip and beat you without mercy. Don't think I'm drunk. You deliberately stole that orange and now you are trying to deceive me."

"Am I drunk?" she asked Plum Blossom.

"Certainly not," Plum Blossom said. "You are perfectly sober. It might be well to look in her sleeves. We might find some orange peel there."

Golden Lotus took Chrysanthemum's sleeves and began to feel in them. Chrysanthemum, in a great flurry, struggled to prevent her. Plum Blossom caught her hand. They found some orange peel.

Golden Lotus pinched the girl's face as hard as she could, and boxed her ears. "You thievish slave!" she cried. "You are as ignorant as can be, yet you are cunning enough when it comes to cheating and stealing. I catch you red-handed and you still try to make excuses. I am going to have my tea, so I shall not punish you now. I'll deal with you to-morrow."

"Mother," Plum Blossom said, "don't let her escape you. The best thing we can do is to take off all her clothes and get one of the men to give her a good thrashing. If we do that, she may learn to have some respect for us. If we use a stick as though we were prodding a monkey, she won't take it seriously."

Chrysanthemum's face was swollen. She went to the kitchen, sulking. Golden Lotus divided an orange into two parts and gave one to Plum Blossom. She gave her half the apples and pomegranates, saying: "These are for you. My mother can have the rest." Plum Blossom put them into her sleeve without looking at them, as though they were of no consequence at all.

Golden Lotus was going to give her some of the other things, but Plum Blossom asked her not to.

"I don't care much for sweet things," she said. "Please give them to Grandmother."

Then Golden Lotus went to the chamber and made water. She asked Plum Blossom to get a tub of water so that she could wash. Then she asked what the time was.

"I have been asleep some time," the maid said, "it must be about the third night-watch."

Golden Lotus took down her hair, and went to the inner room. The lamp was nearly out. She pulled up the wick. Then she went to the bed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing was snoring. She undressed and lay down beside him. After a while, she began to toy with his weapon. But Hsi-mên had been playing with Plum Blossom; non excitare potuit, nam nimis erat mollis. Flagrabat illa vino, et super lectum calcibus sedens in os mentulam posuit. Foramen titillavit, caput hic illic movit, intra et extra continuo suxit. Hsi-mên Ch'ing woke up.

"Now, you funny little strumpet, where have you been all this time?"

"We were drinking in the inner court," Golden Lotus said. "The Third Lady gave us a feast and Miss Yü sang. We guessed fingers, threw dice, and played for a long time. I beat Picture of Grace, but Tower of Jade beat me. I had to drink a few cups of wine. Lucky for you that you got away and came here to sleep in peace, but don't think I will let you escape."

"Have you made the belt of ribbon?" Hsi-mên said.

"Yes, it is here." She took it from underneath the bed-clothes, showed it to him, then tied it about his prick and round his waist. She tied it very tightly.

"Have you taken anything?" she asked him.

He told her that he had, and she continued her attentions dum mentula nervis rigeret et recta surgeret, longior transverso digito quam esse soleret. Super corpus viri iacebat sed tam magna erat mentula ut utraque manu cunnum tendere deberet antequam iniri posset. Ubi tandem intraverat, collo manibus prehenso rogavit ut medium corpus teneret; et sensim mentula pressa premensque tota se immersit. "Deliciae meae," inquit illa, "vestem sericam infra te depone." Hsi-mên vestem rubram bis duplicavit et infra lumbos posuit. Tum

mulier iterum se commovebat et mentulam devorabat. "Corculum meum," inquit, "manibus contrecta. Tota iniit. Me omnino complevit. Placetne?"

Hsi-mên manu posita cognovit tam prorsus mentulam iniisse ut nil loci maneret ne pilo quidem. Testiculi soli extra manebant et summa voluptate gaudebat.

"Frigida sum," dixit mulier. "Lucernam transferamus. Aestate incundius erat." Et rursus, "Nonne putas hanc taeniam fibula esse meliorem? Non me laedit, tuam mentulam longiorem facit. Si mihi non credis, super ventrem manum pone. Medullas meas tangi sentio. Amplexere me et sine ut super te dormiam."

"Dormi, puella," inquit Hsi-mên, "te tenebo."

Linguam in os viri inseruit, oculos clausit, et manibus circa eum positis dormivit. Mox tamen excitavit amor. Humeros viri compressit, recta sedit, et sursum deorsum saltavit tam rapide ut mentula invicem tota inivit. "Merior, mi dulcissime," clamavit. Tercenties vir et mulier contrariis ictibus fruebantur, et Hsi-mên primus e pugna recessit. "Me amplexere," inquit mulier, et papillam sugendam dedit. Deinde languit et sucus amatorius ex illa defluebat. Visus est cervus intra eam saltare. Brachia et crura laxavit et capillis operta est. Mentula tamen egressa adhuc rigida manebat et mulier cum mappa tergebat. "What shall we do, darling?" she said. "It is not enough for you even yet."

"Let us go to sleep now," Hsi-mên said. "We will settle that question afterwards."

"I feel as though I were paralysed," Golden Lotus said.

So the mystery of clouds and rain was performed once more. They lay down to sleep and did not wake again till dawn.

Chapter Seventy-four

CASSIA IS FORGIVEN

Wealth and dignity are as the dew of morning
Friends and companions as the gathering of sand.
It is better to sit before a bamboo window
And meditate upon some sacred book.

Contemplation benefits the soul as truly
As any listening to sermons.
When the soul is purified, you may make a cup of tea.
The crowing of the cock is all you fear
For in the morning the entanglement of earthly things
Is as a bundle of hemp.

AT dawn, Golden Lotus and Hsi-mên Ch'ing awoke. Golden Lotus saw that his weapon was still upright like a ramrod. "Darling," she said, "you must forgive me, but I can stand no more. *Tibi mentulam sugam.*"

"Suge," inquit Hsi-mên; "*si mollire poteris, bene exit.*" Mulier clunibus sedens manus in viri crura posuit et mentulam intra labra recepit. Totam horam collusit neque ista languebat. Hsi-mên manibus in collo candido positis mentulam mitra labra totis viribus nunc protraxit nunc retraxit. Mox labra spuma alba madebant et mentulam colore suo rubefecerunt.

"Ying II has invited us to go and see his wife," Golden Lotus said. "Are we going?"

"Why not?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I have a favour to ask of you," Golden Lotus said. "I wonder whether you will grant it me."

"What is it, you little strumpet?"

"Will you give me the Sixth Lady's fur coat? If we go, they will all be wearing fur coats, and I have none."

"We have the coat which General Wang's people pawned. Won't that do?"

"I don't want that. Picture of Grace can have it. Let Beauty of the Snow have the one Picture of Grace had and give me the one which belonged to the Sixth Lady. I will make a pair of scarlet sleeves, with golden storks to go with it, and wear a

white silk skirt. If you give it me, it will be a proof that it has been worthwhile being your wife all this long time."

"You little strumpet, you never lose a chance of doing well for yourself. That fur coat is worth at least sixty taels of silver. If you put it on, will you look well in it?"

"You rascal," Golden Lotus said, "you would give things to any other woman. I am your wife and, if I wear it, so much the more credit to you. If you talk like this, I shall be angry with you."

"One moment you ask for something, and the next you are riding the high horse."

"I am not a maid. There is no reason why you shouldn't do something when I ask you."

Mentulam in genas mollivit et in os recepit. Foramen titillabat et lingua nervum provocabat. Labris firme continuit et molliter movit. Gaudebat Hsi-mên et voluptate crescente cedere parabatur.

"Firmum tene et sine semen exeat," clamavit; et continuo in os mulieris exiit semen quod tarde sorbuit.

It was the day of the reception. Hsi-mên Ch'ing dressed and went out. Golden Lotus stayed in bed.

"Bring me the coat now," she said. "If you put it off you will be too busy."

Hsi-mên went to the room of the Lady of the Vase. The nurse and the maids were up, making tea to set before their mistress's tablet. Heart's Delight was dressed and her face and eyebrows painted. She smiled and offered him a cup of tea, and talked to him as he drank it. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Welcome Spring to get the key. Heart's Delight asked him why he wanted it.

"I am going to give the Fifth Lady the fur coat," he said.

"The sable coat?" Heart's Delight asked.

"Yes," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I am giving it her because she wants it."

Welcome Spring went to do his bidding. He took Heart's Delight on his knee and touched her breast. "My child," he said, "though you have had a baby, your breasts are still small." They kissed each other.

"I have noticed that you often go to her and seldom to the other ladies," Heart's Delight said. "She would be very

pleasant if she were not so suspicious and touchy. The other day, when you were away, she quarrelled with me about the dolly-pin. Fortunately, Sister Han and the Third Lady were there to separate us. I did not mention the matter to you when you came back. I can't imagine who told her that you care for me, or when she found out. Has she spoken to you about it?"

"Yes, she has," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I think the best thing you can do is to go to her and say you're sorry. She can never resist flattery, and she is very easily pleased. Her mouth may be sharp but her heart is in the right place."

"That is so," Heart's Delight said. "We had that quarrel, but the next day, when you came home, she was quite pleasant. She said you were very fond of her, but that the other ladies were not able to rival me. I was to tell her everything, she said, and she would be my friend."

"In that case, there is nothing to bother about," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I will come to you to-night."

"Are you sure?" Heart's Delight said. "Don't tease me."

"Why should I tease you?" Hsi-mên said.

Welcome Spring brought the key. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told her to open the cupboard door and take out the fur coat. The maid shook it, then wrapped it up again.

"I badly need a good skirt and coat," Heart's Delight said softly. "Will you get one for me while there is a chance? And I should like a short coat, if there is one, belonging to my mistress."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing brought out a light blue silk coat, a yellow skirt of soft silk, a pair of embroidered drawers and some blue trousers. He gave them to Heart's Delight. She kotowed and thanked him. He locked up the cupboard.

Heart's Delight took the fur coat to Golden Lotus. She was getting up, dressing her feet as she sat on the bed. When Plum Blossom told her Heart's Delight had come with a fur coat, she understood. Heart's Delight went in.

"Did your father send you?" Golden Lotus said.

"Yes, he told me to bring you this fur coat."

"Did he give you anything?"

"He gave me a dress for the new year, and told me to come and kotow to you."

"There is no need for that," Golden Lotus said. "Your master has taken a fancy to you. Well, there is an old saying that, though there are many boats on the river, they do not block it; and though there are many carriages upon a road, there is still room for traffic. If it amuses you to go in for this kind of thing, do so, but you must do nothing that will injure me. I shall not bother about you any more, and I shall do nothing to interfere with you."

"My mistress is dead," Heart's Delight said, "and though the Great Lady still keeps me here, you are the one on whom I really depend. If you help me, I shall never dare to be ungracious in return. Falling leaves always come back to the root again."

"Perhaps you had better tell the Great Lady about the clothes he gave you," Golden Lotus said.

"I asked her to give me some clothes, and she said Father would give me some when he was free."

"That is all right, then," Golden Lotus said. Heart's Delight went back to her room. Hsi-mên Ch'ing had gone to the great hall.

"When you went for the key," Heart's Delight said to Welcome Spring, "did the Great Lady say anything?"

"She asked what he wanted it for. I didn't tell her about the coat. I said I didn't know. She said no more."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing, in the great hall, watched the preparations for the banquet. The actors of the Hai Yen company, Chang Mei, Chou Shun, Kou Tzŭ-hsiao, came with their properties, and Li Ming and the other boys also came and kowtowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He ordered food to be given to all of them, then told Li Ming and three others to perform in the outer hall, and Tso Shun to entertain the ladies at the back.

Han-Tao-kuo's wife, Porphyry, could not come that day. She bought two boxes of presents and sent Miss Shên, in a sedan-chair, with her boy Chin Ts'ai, to congratulate Tower of Jade on her birthday. Wang Ching took them in and dismissed the chair-men. Aunt Han and Aunt Mêng came, then Mistress Fu, Mistress Kan, Ts'ui Pên's wife, Miss Tuan, and Mistress Pên IV.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing, who was in the great hall, saw Tai An taking in a short lady who wore a silver-grey coat and a red

skirt. Her face was not powdered and her eyes were very narrow. She looked rather like Exquisite. As she was in the passage, Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked who the lady was. Tai An told him it was Pên IV's wife. Hsi-mên said no more. They went on to the inner court to see the Moon Lady, in whose room all the ladies were having tea. Hsi-mên Ch'ing himself came for porridge. He gave the Moon Lady the key.

"Why did you wish to open the cupboard?" his wife asked.

"Golden Lotus told me she was going to Brother Ying's place. She wanted the Sixth Lady's fur coat."

The Moon Lady looked at him sharply. "You don't keep your word," she said. "When she died, you were very angry if anyone suggested getting rid of her maids, but now it seems all right for you to give her clothes away. Why doesn't the Fifth Lady wear her own fur coat? It is a good thing the owner of the coat is dead. If she were alive, I don't know what Golden Lotus would do."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing could not think of any answer to make to this.

Then a servant came to say that Liu, the Provincial Director of Studies, had come to pay back some money, and Hsi-mên went to the great hall to receive him. Tai An brought a card and said that people had come from General Wang's place with presents. Hsi-mên asked what the presents were. The boy said: a roll of silk, a jar of wine, and food. Hsi-mên told Wang Ching to give the messenger a card in return and five ch'ien of silver for himself. Then Cassia came, with the house-porter, bringing four boxes of presents. Tai An took the wrapper. "Please step into the passage, Aunt Cassia," he said hastily. "There is a gentleman in the hall." Cassia went into the passage and Tai An carried the boxes to the Moon Lady's room.

"Has your father seen them?" the Moon Lady asked.

"No," Tai An said, "he has a gentleman with him."

The Moon Lady told him to put the boxes in an adjoining room.

When his visitor had gone, Hsi-mên Ch'ing came to have something to eat.

"Cassia has come and brought some presents," the Moon Lady told him.

"This is the first I have heard of it," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

The Moon Lady told Tiny Jade to open the boxes. There were pies with mincemeat, a special birthday gift; crystallised roses; two roast ducks, and a pair of pig's trotters. Cassia came in from the other room, pearls and jewels all over her head. She was wearing a scarlet double-breasted coat and a blue silk skirt. She kotowed four times to Hsi-mên Ch'ing.

"That will do," Hsi-mên said. "Why did you go to all this expense?"

"Cassia has just told me she is afraid you are still angry with her," the Moon Lady said. "It was really not her fault at all, but her mother's. Cassia had a headache and, that day, Wang III and his friends were on their way to Sesame's place, and called in to have some tea as they were passing. Then the trouble began, but she never saw him."

"She didn't see him this time and she didn't see him that time!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I don't know how she has the face to say so. I'm not interested any more. In a place like yours everything is all right so long as the money comes in. I'm not angry with you in the least."

Cassia knelt on the ground and refused to get up. "Father," she said, "you are right. But may I rot to pieces if I ever let that fellow touch me! May every pore of my skin come out in boils! It is all that old whore's doing. She has no sense at all. She would let anybody in, no matter whether he is handsome or hideous. That is what has made you so angry."

"Now she is here," the Moon Lady said, "let us consider the matter ended. Don't be angry with her any more."

"Stand up, and I'll forgive you," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

But Cassia, with her most winning manner, said: "You must smile at me, Father. Then I'll get up. If you won't, I shall stay here for a year."

Golden Lotus joined them.

"Cassia," she said, "stand up. If you kneel there, and use pretty words to him, he will make all the more fuss. Now you are kneeling before him, but, I tell you, in future when he comes to you, make him kneel down before you and keep him there."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing and the Moon Lady laughed. Cassia rose to her feet.

Tai An came. He was greatly excited. "Their Excellencies have arrived," he said. Hsi-mên Ch'ing put on his robes and went to meet them.

"From to-day," Cassia said to the Moon Lady, "I will give up my father if I may be your daughter."

"I don't believe in your oaths," the Moon Lady said. "You forget them as soon as you have taken them. He went to see you twice and you were not there."

"Heavens!" Cassia cried, "when did he come to my place and find me not there? If he did, may I die this very moment. Somebody has been telling lies. He must have gone to some other place. I know he went to Moonbeam's house and played with the girls there. They are jealous. Probably they are responsible for the whole affair. I don't see how Father could be angry with me otherwise."

"Why don't you girls attend to your business, instead of talking scandal about one another?" Golden Lotus said.

"Mother, you don't know. There is always jealousy among people of our profession. Each one is anxious to get the better of the others. Whenever one seems to be securing a little favour, the others conspire to cast her down."

The Moon Lady gave her tea.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took Censor Sung and Vice-President An to the great hall. After the usual greetings, each of them presented him with a roll of silk and a case of books. They saw that the tables were very well set out, and thanked him repeatedly. Then they sat down to tea.

"I have still another favour to ask you," Sung said. "Hou Shih-ch'üan has just been appointed Master of the Court of Sacrificial Worship. I and those under me would like to entertain him, if possible, here at your house, on the thirtieth. He is to leave for the Eastern Capital on the second of next month. Will you do this for us?"

"Your Excellency has only to command, and I obey," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"The money is here," Sung said. "He summoned an attendant who brought twelve taels of silver which the officers had contributed. "We should like one large table and six small tables. Perhaps a few actors."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing promised to make the necessary arrange-

ments. He took his guests to the harbour. Before long, Assistant-Secretary Ch'ien arrived. The three gentlemen played chess together.

Sung was impressed by the magnificence and convenience of Hsi-mên Ch'ing's house. The books, pictures and furniture were all the best of their kind. In front of the screen stood a gilded tripod with the figures of the Eight Immortals. It was of very fine workmanship and several feet high. Incense was burning in it, and the smoke came out through the mouths of deer and storks. He went and examined it more closely.

"This tripod is beautifully made," he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He turned to the others. "I wrote some time ago to Brother Liu to ask him to get me a pair of tripods like this. I am going to present them to Ts'ai, but they haven't come yet. Ssü-ch'üan, where did you get yours?"

"It came from a man in Huai," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

They went on with their game. Hsi-mên Ch'ing ordered some dainty cakes and other refreshments to be brought, and bade the actors sing songs of the south.

"Our guest has not come yet," Sung said. "It won't look right if we meet him with red faces."

"I don't believe a cup will do us any harm," An said. "It is terribly cold."

Sung was about to send someone to hasten his guest, but one of his attendants said: "We have been already. Their Excellencies are playing chess, but they will be here soon." An told the actors to sing the Spring Song. Before it was over, Ts'ai and Huang were announced. Sung ordered everything to be cleared away. They put their robes straight and went out to welcome their guest.

Ts'ai was wearing a plain gown and a gold buckled girdle. He presented a card to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. An said: "This is his Lordship Hsi-mên. He holds the office of Captain and is one of his Eminence's wards." Ts'ai bowed to Hsi-mên.

"I have long wished to meet you," he said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing replied: "I shall do myself the honour of paying you a visit." After these greetings, they took off their ceremonial clothes, tea was brought, and they sat down to talk. Some time afterwards, the tables were laid, and Ts'ai took the place of honour. Cooks brought soup and cutlets

and rice. The actors came with their list of plays, and Ts'ai bade them play the story of the two faithful lovers. They played two acts, and the wine went round several times. Then the singers came and sang: 'With a whip of jade and a prancing steed, he leaves the Imperial City.' Ts'ai laughed.

"Sung-yüan," he said, "this promises well for you. The black horse is a censor's horse, and the third noble seems like Liu of the long beard."

An said: "But we can't say that this is the day on which the Magistrate of Chiang-chou made his black gown wet with tears."

Everybody laughed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing told Ch'un Hung to sing: 'We have made report to the Golden Gate of peace upon the frontier.'

Sung was delighted. He said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "What a charming boy!"

"Hsi-mên said: 'He is one of my household, and comes from Yang-chou.'" Sung took the boy's hand, and asked him to pour wine for him. Then he gave him three ch'ien of silver, and the boy kotoed to thank him.

The sun was going down. Ts'ai saw that it was getting late, and told his servant to bring his clothes. He made ready to go. The others tried to persuade him to stay, but in vain. They went with him to the gate. Two officials were bidden to take presents to the wharf. As Sung was going he said to Hsi-mên Ch'ing: "I will not thank you to-day, since I am putting you to still further trouble." Then they all went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back and dismissed the actors. "I shall want you again the day after to-morrow," he said to them. "Be sure to bring some specially good singers, his Excellency is going to invite Governor Hou."

He called for wine and sent Tai An for Scholar Wên. He sent Lai An for Ying Po-chüeh. The two men came almost at the same moment, made a reverence to their host, and sat down. The three boys sang and wine was served.

"The ladies are all coming to see you to-morrow," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Ying Po-chüeh. "Have you engaged any singers or entertainers for them?"

"That's a nice thing to ask!" Po-chüeh said. "How can you expect me to do all that, when I'm so poor? I've engaged

a couple of singers, and I hope my sisters-in-law will come early."

In the inner court, the two Mistresses Mêng were the first to go away. Aunt Yang was about to follow them but the Moon Lady asked her to stay longer. "Nun Hsüeh has sent her novices to fetch the sacred texts," she said, "and you might as well stay and hear them read this evening."

"I should very much like to stay," Aunt Yang said, "but I have been asked to go to my nephew's betrothal party tomorrow. I cannot very well fail to go."

When she had gone, the ladies drank together. When the lamps were brought, the wives of the three clerks went away. Miss Tuan stayed, and old woman P'an went to Golden Lotus's room. Aunt Wu, Cassia, Miss Shên, Miss Yü, the nuns, Tower of Jade, Picture of Grace, and Golden Lotus, were left in the Moon Lady's room.

When the boys began to bring in the things they knew that the party in the outer court had broken up. Golden Lotus hurriedly went out and stood silently at the corner door. Hsi-mên Ch'ing, supported by Lai An with a lantern, came rolling by. He had meant to go and see Heart's Delight but, seeing Golden Lotus, he took her hand and went to her room. Lai An went on to the Moon Lady's room to give her the cups and chop-sticks.

The Moon Lady thought Hsi-mên Ch'ing was coming to her room, and she had sent Miss Shên, Miss Yü, and Cassia to stay with Picture of Grace. "Is your father coming?" she said to Lai An.

"He has gone to the Fifth Lady's room," Lai An told her. The Moon Lady was annoyed.

"The fellow doesn't know what he's doing," she said to Tower of Jade. "I was sure he would come here and go with you. I can't imagine why he has gone to her again. But, now I come to think of it, she has been looking lovesick these last few days. She doesn't seem able to leave him for a moment."

"Oh, never mind, Sister," Tower of Jade said, "if we talk like this, it will look as though we wished to beat her at her own game. Didn't you notice how the nun poked fun at us, saying that, no matter where he went, he could not go beyond

these six rooms? Let him do what he likes. We cannot control him."

"They must have arranged it beforehand," the Moon Lady said. "When she heard that the party in the outer court was over, she dashed out as though her life depended on it." She said to Tiny Jade: "There is no one in the kitchen. Shut the second door and tell the nuns to come. We will listen to their preaching." She asked Picture of Grace, Miss Shên, Miss Tuan, and Miss Yü to come back again.

"I have sent one of the young nuns to fetch the True History of the Lady Huang," she said. "Unfortunately, Aunt Yang has left us."

She told Flute of Jade to make some good tea.

"You and I will take our turn with the tea," Tower of Jade said to Picture of Grace. "We must not trouble the Great Lady all the time." So they gave orders for tea. The table was set. The three nuns came and sat on the bed with their legs crossed, and the other ladies sat down and disposed themselves to listen. The Moon Lady washed her hands and burned incense. Then Nun Hsüeh opened the text of the True Story of the Lady Huang and read:

We know that the Law never perisheth. It proceedeth into the void. The TAO is without life, and, when it giveth life, it advantageth us in no way. From the Holy Body are manifested the Eight Incarnations, and from the Eight Incarnations is manifested the Holy Body. Such is the brightness of the Lamp of Wisdom that it openeth a window to the world: so clear is the Mirror of Buddha that it shineth to the bottom of the dark way.

A hundred years is as the twinkling of an eye.

The four bodies of illusion are but shadows.

Yet, every day, people busy themselves in the dust; they make haste all day to compass their own ends. They know not what they do.

Only Nature is glorious and perfect.

As for them, they pursue the six roots of vanity and concupiscence. Though their achievements and their renown are known to all the world, yet they are but a dream. Though their dignity and their wealth make men amazed,

they cannot escape a sudden end. As wind and fire they die away, and there is no exception either for old or young. The water wears away many a mountain.

After this, the nun read some short homilies and sang hymns. Then she began to tell the story of the Lady Huang, whence she sprang, how she read the sacred books and gave alms. How she died and was born again as a man, and how five men and women went up to Heaven at the same moment. She did not end her story before the second night-watch.

Picture of Grace's maid brought tea for the ladies, and Tower of Jade's maid brought fruit and food, a large jar of wine, and a big pot of tea. The Moon Lady told Flute of Jade to give the nuns cakes and dainties to eat with the tea.

"Now that the teachers have done," Cassia said, "it is my turn to offer you a song."

"You are very kind," the Moon Lady said.

"I will sing first," Miss Yü said.

"Very well," said the Moon Lady.

Then Miss Shên said: "When she has finished, I will sing."

Cassia would not have this. "What song would you like, Mother?" she asked. The Moon Lady asked her to sing: 'The stillness of the late night-watch.' Cassia offered wine to all the ladies, then took her lute and sang to them. When she had done, Miss Yü was about to take the lute, but Miss Shên took it from her.

"I will sing: 'The hanging of the portraits in the twelfth month.' She began: "The fifteenth day of the first month is the merry Feast of Lanterns. We take handfuls of incense and do homage to Heaven and Earth."

Aunt Wu was sleepy. Before Miss Shên had finished, she drank her tea and went to the Moon Lady's bedroom to sleep. Afterwards, Cassia went to sleep with Picture of Grace, Miss Tuan with Tower of Jade. The nuns went to Beauty of the Snow and Miss Yü and Miss Shên to Flute of Jade. The Moon Lady herself slept with her sister-in-law.

There is an ancient tradition that when a woman is with child she should never sit down on one side, or lie on one

side. She should never listen to exciting music or look upon any immodest colour. She should occupy all her time with poetry and books, with gold and jade. If she does this, she will give birth to a boy or a girl who will be intelligent and good. This we call the education of the child in the womb. Now that the Moon Lady was with child, she should not have allowed the nuns to tell these stories of life, death and re-incarnation. In consequence of this, one of the Holy Ones came to her and, afterwards, her son mysteriously disappeared, so that the family of Hsi-mên came to an end. It was very sad.

Chapter Seventy-five

GOLDEN LOTUS QUARRELS WITH THE MOON LADY

Butterflies hover in couples among the flowers beside the
stream

South of the hills and west of the river.

The wind and the moon are distraught with love.

In the ancient palace

The beautiful woman is filled with discontent

Clouds and rain are in wild confusion.

She opens her fragrant mouth, and the words flow from her
lips

She presses her delicate cheeks in wild abandon.

Say not that the life of love is without substance

When one oriole has finished its song

Another takes up the melody.

GOLDEN LOTUS met Hsi-mên at the corner door and went with him to her room. He sat down on the bed. "Why don't you undress?" she said to him.

He smiled and kissed her. "I came to tell you I am going somewhere else to-night. Please give me my love-instruments."

"You rascal," Golden Lotus said, "do you think you can get round me with soft words like these? If I had not been standing at the door, you would have been with her already. You would never have come near me. I know. This morning you arranged everything with that evil slut. That was why she brought me the fur coat and kotowed to me. What do you take me for? You won't get over me in that sort of way. When the Lady of the Vase was alive, I counted for nothing. But that bird is no longer in the nest. I'm not going to make the same mistake a second time."

"Rubbish!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing. "If she hadn't come and kotowed to you, you would have had just as much to say."

Golden Lotus was silent for a long time. "I will let you go, but you shall not have the instruments," she said at last. "You want to use them for your dirty work with that bad bone. When you come back to me they will be filthy."

"But I am so accustomed to them I don't know what to do without them."

He badgered her for a long time, and she gave him the silver clasp. "Take it, if you must have it," she said. Hsi-mên Ch'ing put it into his sleeve and went out staggering.

Golden Lotus called him back. "Tell me. Are you going to spend all night with her? If you do, you'll have all the maids laughing at you. You'd better stay a little while and then send her packing."

"I shall not stay very long," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He went out again.

Again Golden Lotus called him back. "Come here," she said, "I am talking to you. Why are you in such a hurry?"

"What do you want now?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I am allowing you to go and sleep with her, but I forbid you to talk a lot of nonsense. If you do, she will give herself airs in front of me again. If I find out you have done anything of the sort, I will bite off your weapon the next time you come to me."

"Oh, you funny little whore," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "you talk enough to kill anybody." He went out.

"Let him go," Plum Blossom said. "Why do you try to keep him in order? You know the old saying: if a mother-in-law has too much to say, the daughter-in-law will become deaf. If you go on like that, people will only hate you more. Let us have a game of chess."

She told Chrysanthemum to shut the corner door. Then they sat at the table and played chess.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Lady of the Vase's room and pulled aside the shutter. Heart's Delight, Welcome Spring, and Hibiscus were having supper on the bed. When Hsi-mên came in, they all got up.

"Don't mind me," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. He went to the inner room and sat down in a chair before the tablet of his dead wife. After a while, Heart's Delight came out to him.

"It is cold here, Father," she said, smiling, "come into the other room."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing put his arms round her and kissed her. They went into the other room together. Tea was boiling on

the fire and Welcome Spring offered him some. Heart's Delight stood before the bed, near the fire.

"You have had no wine," she said. "We have had a pot of *Chin Hua* wine and some food for my dead lady and we kept some for you."

"You take the food and give me some of the fruit," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I don't want any *Chin Hua* wine." Then he said to Hibiscus: "Take a lantern and go to my study. There is a jar of grape wine there. Ask Wang Ching for it and warm some for me."

Welcome Spring set the table. "Sister," Heart's Delight said to her, "open the boxes and let me find something for Father to eat with his wine." She picked out some special dainties and fruits and put them on the table. Then Hibiscus came with the wine, opened the jar and warmed some. Heart's Delight poured out a cup and offered it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. He tasted it and found it very good. Heart's Delight stood beside the table to wait on him. She gave him some chestnuts.

Welcome Spring knew why he had come and went to spend the night with Hibiscus. When she had gone away and there was no one else in the room, he made the woman sit on his knee and they drank wine from mouth to mouth. He unfastened her dress and uncovered her tender white bosom. He touched her nipples. "My child," he said, "I know nothing so sweet as your lovely white skin. It is as beautiful as your lady's and, when I hold you in my arms, I feel as if I held her."

Heart's Delight smiled. "No, Father, hers was whiter than mine. The Fifth Lady is beautiful but her skin is not so pure. It is not so white as the Third Lady's. But the Third Lady, unfortunately, has a few pock marks on her face. Beauty of the Snow is white and pretty." Then she said: "Welcome Spring is going to give me one of her ornaments. I wish you would give me the golden tiger which belonged to my dead lady. It is something to be worn in the new year, and I would like her to have it."

"If you have nothing to wear, I will give the silversmith some gold and get him to make something for you. The Great Lady has all your lady's ornaments. I can hardly ask her for them."

"I should like a gold tiger," Heart's Delight said. She stood up and kotowed to him.

When they had been drinking for some time, she said: "Father, will you ask my sisters to come and have some wine with us? They will be unhappy if you don't."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing called Welcome Spring, but there was no answer. Heart's Delight went to the kitchen and told the two girls that their master wanted them. Welcome Spring came. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked Heart's Delight to give her some wine and a plate of food. Welcome Spring took them, standing. "Please make Hibiscus come," Heart's Delight said, "I should like to offer her something." The maid went away but returned and said Hibiscus would not come. Then she took her bed-clothes and went to the kitchen to sleep with Hibiscus.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing drank more wine. Then Heart's Delight cleared everything away and gave him some tea. She found fresh silken bed-clothes, and an embroidered pillow. She warmed them and asked him whether he would rather sleep on the large bed or the small one. "I prefer the small one," he said. Heart's Delight put the bed-clothes on the small bed and helped him to undress. She went to the other room to wash, came back, and fastened the door. When she had put the lamp beside the bed, she undressed and got into bed with him.

The woman touched the warrior. The clasp was already in position. It was very hard and frisky and she felt pleased and terrified at the same time. They kissed each other and set to. Hsi-mên, seeing her lying on the bed without any clothes on, was afraid she might catch cold. He picked up her vest and covered her breast with it. Then he took her by the legs and thrust forward violently. Heart's Delight gasped for breath and her face became very red.

"Mother gave me that vest," she said.

"My dear," said Hsi-mên, "never mind about that. Tomorrow, I will give you half a roll of red silk to make underwear, and you shall wear that when you wait on me."

"Thank you," Heart's Delight said.

"I have forgotten how old you are," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What is your surname, and your place in the family? I only remember that your husband's name was Hsiung."

"Yes," Heart's Delight said, "his name was Hsiung Wang-

êrh. My own name is Chang, and I am the fourth child. I am thirty-two years old."

"A year older than I am," he said.

They went on with their love-making, and he called her Chang IV. "My daughter," he said, "serve me well, and, when the Great Lady's baby is born, you shall have charge of it. And, if you yourself bear a son to me, I will make you one of my ladies and you shall take the dead lady's place."

"My husband is dead, and I have no relatives of my own," Heart's Delight said. "I have no other wish than to serve you, and I never want to leave you. If you take pity on me I shall always be grateful."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was very pleased with the way she spoke. He grasped her white legs firmly and plunged forward violently again. She murmured softly and her starry eyes grew dim. *Mox iussit mulierem cruribus divaricatis, ut equam, recumbere, et rubro tapete opertus super eam vehebatur. Mentulam urgebat et luce fulgente dum clunes albas tractat promovebat. "Appella me delicias tuas," inquit, "neque cessaveris. Sine me totum profundam."* Pusam sustulit ut virum caperet et voce tremente delicias suas appellavit. Totam horam colluserunt antequam Hsi-mên cedere vellet. Tandem mentulam detractam mulier mappa tersit et amplexi dormiverunt. Ante lucem mulier excitata mentulam in os recepit. "Tua quinta mater," dixit Hsi-mên, "totam noctem sugit. Non sinit ut e lecto surgam si meiere velim, quia timet ne frigescam et liquorem meum sorbet."

"Quid refert illud?" inquit puella, "ego quoque bibere velim"; et Hsi-mên in os eius meiebat. They made love in every possible way.

The next day, she rose first, opened the door and lighted a fire. Then she helped Hsi-mên Ch'ing to dress. He went to the front court and told Tai An to send Pên IV with two soldiers to take the golden tripod with his card to Censor Sung's place. "When they have delivered it," he said, "they must wait for a return card." He told Ch'ên Ching-chi to pack up a roll of gold silk and a roll of coloured satin. He bade Ch'in T'ung get a horse ready and take them to his Excellency Ts'ai. Then he took breakfast in the Moon Lady's room.

"I don't see how we can all go to see Mistress Ying," the Moon Lady said, "Somebody must stay at home to keep Aunt Wu company."

"But I have got five presents ready," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Of course, you must all go. My daughter is here. She can stay with Aunt Wu. I have promised Brother Ying." The Moon Lady said no more.

Cassia came and kotowed to them. "I am going home today, Mother," she said.

"There is no hurry," the Moon Lady said. "Stay another day."

"My mother is not well," Cassia said, "and there is no one to look after her. I will come and see you again in the fifth month."

She kotowed to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. The Moon Lady gave her some cakes and a tael of silver. When she had had some tea, she went away.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing had put on his ceremonial clothes and was on his way to the outer court when P'ing An came and said that General Ching had come. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to greet him, and they made reverences to one another in the great hall.

"I haven't been to see you, and I have not yet congratulated you upon your promotion," General Ching said.

"And I have not called to thank you for sending me such a splendid present," Hsi-mên Ch'ing replied.

When they had exchanged greetings and taken tea, General Ching said: "I see your horse is waiting for you. Where are you going?"

"Yesterday," Hsi-mên said, "Censor Sung and their Excellencies An, Ch'ien, and Huang, used my house for a reception to Ts'ai the new Governor. Ts'ai is the Imperial Tutor's ninth son. He gave me a card and I am going to call upon him. I must go now because he may be leaving at any moment."

"I have come to ask a favour of you," General Ching said. "You know that Sung's term of office will expire early in the new year. I expect there will be an inspection of all the officers, and I have come to you in the hope that you will mention my name to him. I discovered that he was here yesterday, and

that is why I have called. If any promotion comes to me, I shall owe it to you."

"We are good friends," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "I shall be glad to do anything I can. Give me your record of service. He will be coming here for another party the day after tomorrow and I will speak to him then."

Ching rose and bowed. "I am very much obliged to you. Here is my record of service." He took it from an attendant and handed it to Hsi-mên Ch'ing. It said:

Ching Chung, Garrison Commander of Ch'ing Ho, and officer in command of troops in various districts of Shan-tung. Thirty-two years of age. Born at T'an-chou. In consequence of the exploits of his ancestors, he was given the rank of captain. He passed through the military academy and has been promoted by degrees to his present post in command of troops in Chi-chou, etc.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing had read this, Ching brought out a list of presents and asked him to accept them. Hsi-mên saw: 'Two hundred measures of fine rice.'

"What is this?" he said, "I cannot possibly accept it. If I did, there would be no point whatever in our friendship."

"Ssü-ch'üan," Ching said, "if you do not want it, you can give it to his Excellency. You must not refuse. If you do, I will never trouble you again."

After much demur, Hsi-mên accepted. "When I have spoken to him, I will let you know," he said.

They drank tea again, and Ching went away. Hsi-mên Ch'ing mounted his horse and, with Ch'in T'ung in attendance, went to see Governor Ts'ai.

When Hsi-mên had gone, Flute of Jade, who had helped him to dress, went to see Golden Lotus.

"Mother," she said, "why didn't you stay longer in the inner court last night? Mother said several nasty things about you. She said that, as soon as you heard Father coming from the other court, you dashed after him. She said you got hold of him so tightly that you wouldn't let him go, even to the Third Lady, whose birthday it was. And the Third Lady said she wasn't going to enter into a competition with you; he might go to any room he liked."

"What can I do to clear myself?" Golden Lotus said. "They are not blind. Why couldn't they see that he never came here at all?"

"He comes to you so often," Flute of Jade said. "And now the Sixth Lady is dead, they don't see where else he can go."

"Chickens cannot piddle, but they have to get rid of their water somehow," Golden Lotus said. "One woman has died, but there is another to take her place."

"Mother was angry with you because you asked for the fur coat without speaking to her about it first. She scolded Father when he gave back the key. She said it was lucky for you the Sixth Lady was dead or you wouldn't have had a chance to get the things. If she had been alive, you would only have been able to look at them."

"How absurd!" Golden Lotus said. "He is at liberty to do what he thinks fit. She is not my mother-in-law. It is not for her to control me. So she said I wouldn't let him go, did she? Well, I didn't put a cord about him. What nonsense!"

"I have come to tell you this so that you will know how matters stand. You mustn't mention it to anybody else. Cassia has gone, and the Great Lady is getting ready to go out. You will have to get ready too."

Flute of Jade went away again. Golden Lotus decked herself with flowers and ornaments and powdered her face before the mirror. She told Plum Blossom to go and ask Tower of Jade what colour she was going to wear.

"Since we are still in mourning, Father wishes us all to wear plain clothes," Tower of Jade said.

The ladies decided to wear white hair-nets with pearl bandeaux, and plain-coloured clothes. The Moon Lady alone wore a white head-dress with a gold top, an embroidered coat, and a green skirt. One large sedan-chair and four small ones were waiting for them. They took leave of Aunt Wu, the nuns, and old woman P'an, and set out to Ying Po-chüeh's house to celebrate his baby's first month.

Heart's Delight and Welcome Spring had the food which Hsi-mên Ch'ing had left and a jar of *Chin Hua* wine. They set out these things, took another pot of grape wine from the jar, and, at midday, invited old woman P'an, Plum Blossom,

and Miss Yü to come and enjoy them. Miss Yü played and sang for them.

"I understand that Miss Shên sings that song about hanging up the portraits very well," Plum Blossom said, as they were enjoying their meal. "Why shouldn't we send for her and get her to sing to us?"

Welcome Spring was going to send Hibiscus but, at that moment, Ch'un Hung came in to warm his hands at the fire.

"Now, you thievish little southerner," Plum Blossom said to him, "didn't you go with the ladies?"

"No," Ch'un Hung said, "Father told Wang Ching to go and said I was to stay here."

"You must be frozen, you little southerner, or you wouldn't have come to warm your hands." She asked Welcome Spring to give him some wine. "When he has had it," she said, "we will get him to go for Miss Shên, and she shall come to sing for Grandmother."

When Ch'un Hung had drunk his wine, he went to the inner court. Miss Shên was drinking tea with Aunt Wu, Orchid, Flute of Jade, and the nuns.

"Sister Shên," Ch'un Hung said, "my aunt wants you to go and sing for her."

"Your aunt is here," Miss Shên said. "What are you talking about?"

"I mean Aunt Plum Blossom," the boy said.

"Why does she want me?" Miss Shên said. "Miss Yü is there."

"Go, Miss Shên," Aunt Wu said, "and come back to us later." But Miss Shên would not go.

Ch'un Hung went back and told Plum Blossom that he could not persuade her to come.

"Tell her I want her. Then she will come," Plum Blossom said.

"I did tell her but she wouldn't pay any attention. When I said my aunt wanted her, she cried: 'What aunt are you talking about?' I said: 'Aunt Plum Blossom.' Then she said: 'Why should I bother about her? Miss Yü is there, and that's enough. Who is she to have the audacity to send for me? I am busy. I'm singing for Aunt Wu.' Aunt Wu told her to come, but she wouldn't."

Plum Blossom flew into a temper. Her ears grew red and her face became purple. Nobody could stop her. She rushed to the Moon Lady's room, shook her finger at Miss Shên, and upbraided her.

"How dared you say to the boy: 'What aunt are you talking about?' and: 'How has she the audacity to send for me?' Who are you? Are you a general's wife that I have no right to send for you? You are just a thievish strumpet who runs around from one family to another. Before you have been here any time at all, you begin trying to give yourself airs. What songs do you think you know? You know about a couple of lines, one here and one there. The sort of stuff you sing is the veriest doggerel, never written down on paper. You know a few heathenish songs and a few crazy tunes, and you make all this fuss. I have heard some of the finest singers there are. You simply don't count. That whore, Porphyry, may think a lot about you, but, I assure you, I don't. I don't care how much you try to follow in her footsteps, I'm not afraid of you. Get out of here at once."

Aunt Wu checked her. "You must not beso uncivil," she said.

Miss Shên, surprised at being scolded in this way, could only blink. She was angry but she dared not speak. At last she said: "Sister seems to be very annoyed, but I didn't say anything wrong to the boy. Why does she come and insult me like this? If this is no place for me, there are plenty of other places I can go to."

This made Plum Blossom more angry still. "You wandering vagabond of a strumpet! If you are such a high-principled woman, why do you go begging clothes and food outside your own family? Get out of here and never come back again."

"I don't depend upon this place for my living," Miss Shên said.

"If you did, I should tell the boys to pull your hair out."

"You maid," Aunt Wu said, "what makes you so uncivil to-day? Go to the other court."

Plum Blossom did not move. Miss Shên cried and got down from the bed. She said good-bye to Aunt Wu, packed her clothes, and went away without waiting for a sedan-chair. Aunt Wu told P'ing An to send Hua T'ung with her to Han Tao-kuo's house.

Plum Blossom, still fuming, went back to the outer court. Aunt Wu looked at Orchid and Flute of Jade. "Plum Blossom must have been drinking," she said. "She would not have been so unmannerly if she hadn't. It made me very uncomfortable. She ought to have let Miss Shên go in her own good time. Why should she tell her to get out at once? She wouldn't even let a boy take her away. It is too bad."

"I imagine they have been drinking," Flute of Jade said.

When Plum Blossom got back to her party, she said: "I wish I had boxed her ears. Then she would have known what sort of woman I am. I wasn't going to let her get away with behaviour like that."

"You must remember that, when you cut one branch of a tree, you hurt the other branches," Welcome Spring said. "Don't forget Miss Yü is here."

Miss Yü is a very different sort," Plum Blossom said. "She has been coming here for years and everybody likes her. She never refuses to sing if she is asked. She is not in the least like that strumpet. What songs does she know? Always the same few lines from the same few ditties, extremely vulgar, and not at all the sort of thing to be sung in a decent house like this. I don't want to hear her sing. I believe she is trying to put herself in Miss Yü's place."

"That is true enough," Miss Yü said. "Last night, when the Great Lady asked me to sing, she took the lute away from me. But don't be angry with her. She has no idea how she ought to behave here, and she doesn't know the respect that is due to you."

"That's what I told her," Plum Blossom said. "I said: 'Go and tell Han Tao-kuo's wife. I don't care.'"

"Sister," old woman P'an said, "why let yourself be so upset?"

"Let me give you a cup of wine to make you calmer," said Heart's Delight.

"This daughter of mine always flies into a temper when she is provoked," Welcome Spring said. "Now, Miss Yü, pick out one of your best songs and sing it for her."

Miss Yü took up her lute. "I will sing 'Ying Ying made trouble in the bed-chamber' for Grandmother and Sister Plum Blossom."

"Sing it well and you shall have some wine," Heart's Delight told her.

Welcome Spring took a cup of wine and said to Plum Blossom: "Now, Sister, no more tempers. Drink this cup of wine from your mother's hand."

This made Plum Blossom laugh. "You little strumpet!" she said, "how dare you call yourself my mother? Miss Yü, don't sing that song. Sing: 'The river is in flood, and the water has reached my door.'"

Miss Yü took her lute and sang the first line: 'The flowers are dainty and the moon delightful.' They enjoyed their wine.

When Hsi-mên Ch'ing returned from the wharf where he had visited Ts'ai, P'ing An said: "A messenger has been from Captain Ho to ask you to go early to the office to-morrow. Some robbers have been arrested, and they are to be tried. Prefect Hu has sent a hundred copies of the new calendar; and General Ching, a pig, a jar of wine, and four packets of silver. I gave them to brother-in-law, and he took them to the inner court. We did not send a card in return because the servant said he would call again this evening. I gave a return card and a ch'ien of silver to his Lordship Hu's servant. Your kinsman, Master Ch'iao, has sent a card asking you to take wine with him to-morrow."

Then Tai An came, bringing a return card from Sung. "I took the things to his office," the boy said. "His Excellency said he would settle up with you to-morrow, and he gave me and the men five ch'iens of silver and a hundred copies of the new calendar."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing went into the great hall. Ch'un Hung hurried to warn Plum Blossom and the others.

"Are you still drinking?" he said. "Father has come back."

"What if he has, you little southerner?" Plum Blossom said. "He won't interfere with us. The ladies are not at home and he won't come here."

They went on drinking and joking, and nobody left the party. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Moon Lady's room. Aunt Wu and the nuns went to the adjoining room. Flute of Jade took his clothes and got something ready for him to eat.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing summoned Lai Hsing and said to him: "You must see about preparing another feast. On the thirtieth, Censor Sung is going to have a party here, and, on the first, the two eunuchs, Liu and Hsüeh, Major Chou and the others, are coming."

When Lai Hsing had gone, Flute of Jade asked Hsi-mên what kind of wine he would like.

"Open the jar which General Ching has just sent," he told her. "I would like to taste it and see if it is any good."

Then Lai An came and said he was going to take a man to meet the Moon Lady and the other ladies. Flute of Jade asked him to unseal the jar. Then she poured out some wine and handed it to her master. It was a beautiful shade of green, and rather pungent. Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked for more. Food was brought and he had his meal. Lai An took some soldiers with lanterns to escort the ladies home.

They came in, wearing their fur coats. Beauty of the Snow was the only one to kotow to Hsi-mên and the Moon Lady. Then she went to the other room to see Aunt Wu and the nuns. The Moon Lady sat down and said: "Mistress Ying seemed very glad to see us. Her neighbour, Madam Ma, and Brother Ying's sister-in-law, Miss Tu, and several other ladies were there, perhaps ten in all. There were two singing-girls. The baby is big and chubby, but Ch'un Hua seems thinner and darker than she used to be. Her long face is not very beautiful. It looks just like a donkey's. She is not at all well, and the household is in a mess, for there are not enough people to look after it. When we came away, Brother Ying kotowed and thanked us most effusively. He asked us to thank you for the presents you had sent."

"Did Ch'un Hua dress and come out to see you?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing asked.

"Of course she did. She has eyes and a nose like everybody else. She is not a spirit. Why shouldn't she come out to see us?"

"Oh, the poor maid!" Hsi-mên said. "If I put a few black beans on her, I'm sure some pig would run off with her."

"You shouldn't talk like that," the Moon Lady said. "You always try to make it appear that nobody is worth looking at except your own wives."

Wang Ching, who was standing beside them, said: "When Uncle Ying saw the ladies coming, he didn't come out to welcome them. He ran to a little room and peeped through the window. I caught him there, and I said: 'Old gentleman, you are lacking in propriety. 'What are you looking for?' He kicked me out."

"The rascal!" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, laughing. "When he comes to-morrow, I will cover his face with dust."

"Yes," Wang Ching said, and laughed too.

The Moon Lady shouted at him. "Don't tell such lies, you young rascal. He didn't look at us at all. You are telling stories. We never saw him all day long, except when we were leaving and he came to kotow to us."

Wang Ching went away. The Moon Lady got up and went to see her sister-in-law and the nuns in the next room. Orchid, Flute of Jade, and the maids and serving-women came to kotow to her.

"Where is Miss Shên?" the Moon Lady said.

Nobody answered. At last Flute of Jade said: "Miss Shên has gone."

"Why didn't she wait for me?" the Moon Lady asked.

Aunt Wu saw that the business could not be kept hidden. She told the Moon Lady of the quarrel between Plum Blossom and Miss Shên. The Moon Lady was angry. "If she didn't wish to sing, why should she?" she said. "The maid has no business to be so conceited and undisciplined as to curse her. The master of this house does not behave properly himself, and the maids do what they like. The whole household is topsy-turvey." She turned to Golden Lotus: "You ought to keep her in order instead of letting her behave so outrageously." "I have never seen such a blind mule as Miss Shên," Golden Lotus said, laughing. "If the wind didn't blow, the trees wouldn't shake. She goes from one person's door to another, and singing is her business. When she is asked to sing, she should do so with a good grace. If she made a fuss and gave herself airs, Plum Blossom was right to tell her what she thought about her."

"All very well," the Moon Lady said, "but if she goes on like this, people, whether good or bad, simply won't stand it. They'll go away. You will do nothing to keep her in order."

"I don't see why I should punish my maid because she put this blind strumpet in her place."

The Moon Lady grew angry. Her face flushed.

"Very well, spoil your maid, and she will drive all our relatives and neighbours away."

She went to Hsi-mên Ch'ing and he asked her what was the matter.

"I expect you know," the Moon Lady said. "You have such polite young ladies for your maids. Now, one of them has been cursing Miss Shên and making her go away."

"But why wouldn't she sing for her?" Hsi-mên said, smiling. "Don't worry. To-morrow, I'll send her two taels of silver, and that will put matters right."

"Miss Shên's box is still here. She didn't take it away," the Moon Lady said. She saw that Hsi-mên Ch'ing was laughing. "There you are, laughing, instead of sending for the maid and giving her a scolding. I don't see anything to laugh at."

Picture of Grace and Tower of Jade were there but, seeing how angry the Moon Lady was, they went to their own rooms. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went on drinking wine. The Moon Lady went to the inner room to take off her ornaments and ceremonial dress.

"Where have those four packets of silver on the chest come from?" she said to Flute of Jade.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing answered her. "General Ching sent them. He wants me to speak to Sung for him."

"Brother-in-law brought them. I forgot to tell you," Flute of Jade said.

"Silver belonging to other people should always be put in the chest at once," the Moon Lady said.

Flute of Jade put it in the chest.

Golden Lotus was still sitting there, waiting for Hsi-mên Ch'ing to go to the outer court. It was a *Yên Tzũ* day. She was going to take the medicine Nun Hsüeh had given her and hoped that, after she had slept with him, she would conceive.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing showed no sign of moving. At last, she pulled aside the lattice. "If you are not coming, I shall go," she said. "I haven't patience to wait any longer."

"You go first," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "I will come when I've finished my wine."

Golden Lotus went away. Then the Moon Lady said: "I don't wish you to go to her. I have something to say to you. The pair of you wear the same pair of trousers, and you are making my life unbearable. She even has the audacity to come to my room and call you away. The shameless hussy! She might be your only wife and the rest of us nobodies. You are a foolish scamp. No wonder people talk about you behind your back. We are all your wives and you ought to treat us decently. You needn't make everybody aware of the fact that she has got you body and soul. Since you came back from the Eastern Capital, you haven't spent a single night in the inner court. Naturally people are annoyed. You should put fire into the cold stove before you begin on the hot one. You have no right to allow one woman to monopolise you. So far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter. I don't care for games of this sort, but the others will not stand it. They don't say anything, but they think a great deal. Tower of Jade didn't eat a thing all the time we were at Brother Ying's place. She has probably caught a chill on the stomach. Mistress Ying gave her two cups of wine, but she couldn't keep it down. Will you go and see her?"

"Is that true?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "Have these things taken away. I won't drink any more." He went at once to Tower of Jade's room. She was undressed and lying on the bed, sick. She was retching painfully. "My child, how do you feel?" Hsi-mên said. "I will send for a doctor for you." Tower of Jade was vomiting. She did not answer. He helped her to lie down, but she pressed her hands to her breast.

"My dear, how are you? Tell me."

"I have a good deal of pain. Why do you ask? Go and attend to your own affairs."

"I didn't know," Hsi-mên said. "The Great Lady has only just told me."

"Of course you didn't know," Tower of Jade said. "I am not your wife. You only love the one who has established herself in your heart."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing took her in his arms and kissed her. "Don't tease me," he said. "Fragrance, make some strong tea for your mother at once."

"I have some already made," Fragrance said. She brought a cup. Hsi-mên took it and held it to Tower of Jade's lips.

"Give it to me," she said, "I will drink it by myself. Don't try to be pleasant. Go and sell your hot pies where they are wanted. I am not jealous. The sun must have risen in the west to-day, since you come to see me. I can't imagine why the Great Lady said anything to you about it."

"You don't understand," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "The last few days, I have really been too busy to come."

"Yes," Tower of Jade said, "you have too much to think about; you can't think about anyone but your sweetheart. We are stale. We're only fit to be thrown into the dust-bin. Perhaps in ten years' time you will remember us."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing still went on kissing her. "Go away," she said, "I can't bear the smell of the wine you've been drinking. I have had nothing to eat all day and I haven't strength enough to play with you."

"If you have had nothing to eat, let me tell the maid to bring something. I haven't had my supper yet. I will have it with you."

"No," Tower of Jade said. "I feel too ill. If you want anything to eat, go and have it elsewhere."

"If you won't eat," Hsi-mên said, "neither will I. Let us go to bed. To-morrow I will send for Doctor Jên."

"Doctor Jên or Doctor Li, it's all the same to me. I shall send for old woman Liu. She'll give me medicine that will cure me."

"Lie down," Hsi-mên said, "and let me stroke your stomach. That will make you better. You know I am an expert at massage." Then he suddenly remembered. "The other day," he said, "Liu, the Director of Studies, gave me ten cow-bezoar pills from Kuang-tung. If you take one with some wine you will be all right in no time." He said to Fragrance: "Go to the Great Lady and ask her for the medicine in the porcelain jar. And bring some wine with you."

"I'm sure you will be well as soon as you have taken it," he said to Tower of Jade.

"I can't think of anything horrid enough to say to you," Tower of Jade said. "What do you know about medicine? And, if you want wine, there is some here."

Fragrance came back with two pills. Hsi-mên Ch'ing made her heat the wine. He took off the outer wax. There was a golden pill inside it. He gave it to Tower of Jade.

"Now heat another cup of wine for me," he said to Fragrance. "I am going to take some medicine myself."

Tower of Jade looked at him. "You dirty creature! If you are going to take medicine, go somewhere else to do it. What do you think you're going to do here? You've decided I'm not going to die just yet, so you think you'll begin your tricks. In spite of all the pain I've had, you are ready to begin. No, I'll have none of it."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing laughed. "Very well, my dear. I won't take any medicine. We'll go to bed."

When she had taken the pill, they went to bed. Hsi-mên Ch'ing fondled her soft breasts. With one hand he pressed her sweet nipples, and, with the other, drew her white neck closer.

"How do you feel now that you've taken the pill?" he said.

"Not so bad as I did, but still bad enough."

"Don't worry," Hsi-mên said, "you'll soon be better. To-day, while you were out, I gave Lai Hsing fifty taels of silver. We are going to give a banquet for Sung the day after tomorrow. On the first of next month we must burn paper offerings, and, on the third, we must devote a couple of days to entertaining people. We can't accept presents and give nothing in return."

"What do I care whether you have people coming or not?" Tower of Jade said. "On the twentieth, I am going to get the boys to settle up the accounts, and I shall give up this house-keeping business. You will probably hand it over to Golden Lotus. It is time she did some work. Only yesterday she was saying there was nothing very hard about it, and there is no reason why I should always be bothered with it."

"You shouldn't pay any attention to that little whore," Hsi-mên said. "She is always bragging, but, if she is given anything of importance to do, she can't do it. If you really mean to hand it over to her, wait until these parties are over."

"Oh, you are very clever, Brother," Tower of Jade said. "You pretend you don't love her more than the rest of us, but

now you are giving yourself away. You say I am to hand the accounts over to her when the parties are over. Why should I have all the hard work? In the morning, when I am dressing my hair, the boys come in and out, measuring silver and getting change. It takes my breath away and uses me up. And nobody even says: 'Well done!' "

"My child," Hsi-mên said, "don't you know the saying: 'When anyone has managed the house for three years, even the dog hates him?'"

He slowly lifted up one of her legs and put it over his arm. He embraced her, still holding it. He saw that she was wearing a pair of red silk slippers. "My child," he said, "what could be more delightful to me than this white leg? If I had all the women in the world to choose from, I could never find one so tender and so lovable as you."

"Oh, chatterbox!" Tower of Jade said. "Do you imagine anybody believes that woolly mouth of yours? Other women have legs just as white. You really mean that my skin is rough, and you are calling black, white."

"My dear, if I am lying to you, may I die this minute!"

• "Don't take any oaths," Tower of Jade said.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing put on the clasp and slipped his staff into her.

"I know the fellow you are," Tower of Jade cried. "You always come to this." Then she saw the clasp. "When did you put that thing on? Take it off at once." Sed Hsi-mên negligens verborum crura prehendit et totis viribus se ursit. Mox sucus amatorius exibat cum sonitu quasi canis polentam devoraret. Mulier cunnum suum mappa tergebat. Tremuit nec loqui potuit.

"Noli longius procedere," inquit, "deliciorum meae. Tergum nuper doluit et liquor albus a me defluxit."

"We will get some medicine from Doctor Jên to-morrow. That will cure it."

The Moon Lady was talking to Aunt Wu and the nuns. By degrees they came to the subject of Plum Blossom and Miss Shên, and the whole story came out.

"Plum Blossom was really very rude," Aunt Wu said. "She insulted Miss Shên in words that cut like knives. I was

obliged to interfere. It was not surprising that Miss Shên was angry. I would never have believed that Plum Blossom could curse people like that. I'm sure she must have been drinking."

"Yes," Tiny Jade said, "she and four others were drinking."

"It is all that unreasonable fellow's fault," the Moon Lady said. "He has encouraged her to give herself such airs. She doesn't care who it is. She won't suffer anybody to speak to her. I shouldn't be surprised if, in future, all sorts of people don't get driven away, and nobody will have anything to do with us. Miss Shên is a girl who goes from one house to another. It won't be very pleasant for us if this story gets about. People will say Hsi-mên Ch'ing's wife must be a dreadful creature. In this plaguy household, it is impossible to say who is master and who the slave. People will not say she is an undutiful slave, but that we are a bad lot. And what will that mean?"

"Never mind," Aunt Wu said, "since your husband says nothing about it, why should we bother?"

The ladies went to their own rooms to sleep.

When Golden Lotus realised that the Moon Lady had prevented Hsi-mên Ch'ing from going to her, so that she missed the *Jên Tzŭ* day, she was very angry. Very early the next morning, she told Lai An to fetch a sedan-chair for old woman P'an.

When the Moon Lady got up, the nuns were ready to go away. She gave each of them some cakes and five ch'ien of silver, and promised that Nun Hsüeh should hold a service in her own temple in the first month. She gave her another tael of silver to buy incense, candles and paper things, and said she would send oil, wheat-flour, rice, and vegetarian food as an offering.

The nuns had tea with Aunt Wu in the upper room, and the Moon Lady sent for Picture of Grace, Tower of Jade, and Hsi-mên's daughter, Orchid.

"How do you feel after taking the pill?" she asked Tower of Jade. "Is your stomach still painful?"

"I brought up a little water this morning," Tower of Jade said, "but I feel better now."

The Moon Lady told Flute of Jade to go for Golden Lotus and old woman P'an. Flute of Jade said: "Tiny Jade is seeing

about the pies. I will go myself." She went to Golden Lotus's room.

"Where is Grandmother?" she said. "They want you to go and have tea with them."

"I sent her away this morning," Golden Lotus said.

"Why did you send her away without telling anybody?" Flute of Jade said.

"Why should she stay any longer? She seems to have made herself a nuisance."

"But I have a piece of dried meat and four preserved melons for her. I never dreamed she would go. You keep them for her." The maid gave the food to Golden Lotus, who put it in a drawer.

"Last night, when you had gone away," Flute of Jade said, "the Great Lady told Father you were the one who governed this household, and that you and he wore the same pair of trousers. She said you were a shameless thing, monopolising him as you did, so that he was afraid to go to the inner court. She persuaded him to go and sleep in the Third Lady's room. Then she told Aunt Wu and the nuns that you spoilt Plum Blossom so much that she even dared to insult Miss Shên. Father is going to send a tael of silver to Miss Shên to make things all right."

Flute of Jade went back to the Moon Lady and said that the Fifth Lady was coming, but that her mother had gone home.

The Moon Lady looked at Aunt Wu. "You see! I said something to her yesterday, and now she flies into a temper and sends her mother away without a word to me. She must be up to something, but what form the storm will take I can't think."

The Moon Lady did not know it, but Golden Lotus was already in the room on the other side of the lattice. She came in suddenly.

"Great Sister," she said, "I have sent my mother home. Did you say that I monopolise our husband? I wish to know."

"Yes, I did say so," the Moon Lady said. "What about it? Ever since he came back from the Eastern Capital, he has spent all his time in your room. He never comes near the inner court. Do you flatter yourself that you are his only wife, and the rest of us nothing? Whether the others realise what you

are about, I don't know, but I do. A few days ago, when Cassia went away, my sister-in-law asked me why she was in such a hurry and why our husband was angry with her. I told her I didn't know. You pushed yourself forward and said you were the only one who knew all about it. Of course you know. You never lose hold of him for a moment."

"If he didn't wish to come to my room," Golden Lotus said, "do you imagine I should keep him there with a pig's-hair cord? Do you suggest that I am a whore?"

"Aren't you?" the Moon Lady said. "Yesterday, when he was here, you pulled the lattice aside and dashed in to take him away. What do you mean by it? Our husband is a man. He does a man's work. What crime has he committed that you should tie him with a cord of pig's hair? You foolish creature! I said nothing about it until you made me do so. On the sly, you asked him for a fur coat. You didn't say a word to me about it, even when you put it on. If everybody behaved like that, my function here might as well be to look after the ducks. It is time you realised that, even in a poor house, there must be someone in authority. You allowed your maid to sleep with him. It was like cat and rat sleeping together. You indulge her in every possible way, and now she has the audacity to insult people. Yet you still stick up for her and won't be contradicted."

"What about my maid?" Golden Lotus cried. "You think she is bad, and you would like to get rid of me. As for that fur coat, I did ask him for it, but it wasn't only to get that for me that he opened the door. He got clothes for other people too. Why don't you mention that fact? I spoil my maid. I am a whore. And I make my husband happy. Why don't you say that woman is a whore too?"

The Moon Lady became more and more angry. Her cheeks became crimson. "No," she said, "not you, but I am the whore! But when I married him, I was a virgin, not a married woman who got him into her clutches. I am no whorish husband-stealer. It is clear enough which of us is a whore and which is virtuous."

"Sister, don't lose control of yourself," Aunt Wu said.

But the Moon Lady went on. "You have killed one husband already, and now you are trying to kill another."

"Mother," Tower of Jade said, "why are you so angry to-day, beating us all with the same stick? You, Fifth Lady, must give way to the Great Lady. You must not quarrel with her."

"The proverb says: 'When there is fighting, no hand is gentle: when there is quarrelling, no words are soft,'" Aunt Wu said. "When you quarrel like this, it makes your relatives ashamed. If you won't pay any attention to me, I shall take it that you are angry with me and call for my sedan-chair and go home."

Picture of Grace hastily begged her not to do so.

Golden Lotus sat down on the floor and rolled about. She banged her face on the ground and knocked the hair-net from her head. She cried aloud.

"Let me die!" she shouted. "Why should I go on living a miserable life like this? You were married in due and proper manner: I only followed him to the house. Very well! There need be no more difficulty, I will ask him to set me free. I will go, but I fear that, if you imagine you will capture a husband thereby, you are mistaken."

"Now, you disturber of the peace," the Moon Lady said, "before one can get a word out, you pour forth a stream of words. You roll about on the floor. You put all the blame on us. Will you ask my husband to divorce me? Don't think anybody is afraid of you, even if you are so clever."

"No, indeed!" Golden Lotus cried, "you are the only good and virtuous woman here. Who would dare to quarrel with you?"

"Am I not good and virtuous? Do you suggest that I have had a lover in this house?" The Moon Lady was growing still more angry.

"If you haven't, has anybody else? Let me see you point to any lover I have had."

When the quarrel had reached this pitch, Tower of Jade went forward and tried to pull Golden Lotus away. "Don't behave like this," she said. "These holy nuns will be ashamed of you. Stand up, and I will go with you to your room."

Golden Lotus would not get up. Tower of Jade and Flute of Jade pulled her up. They took her to her own room.

"Sister," Aunt Wu said to the Moon Lady, "you ought not

to get into a state like this when you are in such delicate health. There is really nothing very much the matter. When you sisters are happy, I am content; but, if you spend all the time quarrelling and will not listen to what I say, I shall not be able to come any more."

The nuns gave their novices something to eat. Then they took their boxes and came to say good-bye to the Moon Lady. "Teachers," the Moon Lady said, "you must not scorn me."

"There is some smoke to every fire," Nun Hsüeh said. "A tiny flame in our mind can give rise to much smoke. My advice is: give way to each other. As Buddha says: Our minds should be as calm as a ship at anchor. We must cleanse our hearts and make them pure. If we leave the lock open and loose the chain, ten thousand diamond clubs can not control us. The first step towards Buddhahood is self-control. Thank you for all your kindness to us. We hope you will be very well."

They made reverence to the Moon Lady, and she returned it. "I feel that, this time, I have entertained you very poorly," she said, "but I will send you something later." She asked Picture of Grace and Orchid to see the nuns to the gate. "Mind the dog," she said.

When the nuns had gone, she sat down again with Aunt Wu. "This business has made my arms numb and my fingers as cold as ice," she said. "I only had a mouthful of tea this morning, and there is nothing but that in my stomach."

"Over and over again, I have advised you not to quarrel," Aunt Wu said. "You never listen to me. Now you are getting near your time. Why do you make this trouble?"

"You saw the whole affair," the Moon Lady said. "Am I the one who causes the trouble? You might as well talk about a thief arresting a policeman. I can give way to everybody but nobody will give way to me. There is only one husband here, and she wants him all for herself. She schemes and plots with that maid of hers. They do things which no other person would ever dream of doing. Though they are women, they have no idea of decency. She never looks at herself, but opens her mouth and pours forth insults. When the Lady of the Vase was alive she was constantly having rows with her. She was always coming and telling me one thing and another that the Lady of the Vase had done wrong. She is the kind of woman

who is always causing trouble. She has an animal's heart and a human face. She never admits saying anything. She takes such dreadful oaths they would frighten anybody. But I will keep my eyes open and watch her. I will see what sort of an end she comes to. When we had tea, I sent for her mother. How could I have dreamed she would send her away? She was all ready to make trouble with me. She sneaked up here determined to do so. Well! I am not afraid of her. Let her tell my husband and he can divorce me."

"We were all in the room," Flute of Jade said. "I was standing near the fire, but I did not hear the Fifth Lady come in. I never heard a sound."

"She walks like a spirit," Beauty of the Snow said. "She always wears felt shoes, so she doesn't make any sound. Don't you remember the trouble she used to make for me when she first came here? She said all sorts of things about me behind my back, and my husband beat me twice in consequence. At that time, Sister, you said it was my fault."

"She is accustomed to burying people alive," the Moon Lady said. "To-day she thought she would try her hand on me. You saw her beating her head on the ground and rolling about. When he comes back and finds out about it, I shall come off worst."

"You mustn't say that, Mother," Picture of Grace said, "the world cannot be turned upside down."

"You don't know," the Moon Lady said. "She is one of those nine-tailed foxes. Better people than I have died at her hands. How shall I escape? What flesh and bones have I that they can withstand her? You have been here several years, and you came from the bawdy-house, but you are worth a dozen of her. See how desperate she was yesterday. She dashed into my room and called him. She said: 'I'm not going to wait for you if you don't come.' It looked as though he belonged to her, and she had the right to have him. I shouldn't care if he hadn't gone to her room every night since he came back from the Eastern Capital. Even when it was somebody's birthday, she wouldn't let him go. She wants all ten fingers to put into her own mouth."

"Why do you worry about it so much?" Aunt Wu said. "You are nearly always ill. Let him do what he likes. If you

are trying to fight other people's battles, you will be the one to suffer."

Flute of Jade brought some food, but the Moon Lady would not touch it. "My head aches, and my heart feels very queer," she said. She told Flute of Jade to put a pillow on the bed so that she might lie down, and asked Picture of Grace to keep Aunt Wu company. Miss Yü was going, so the Moon Lady gave orders that a box of cakes and five ch'ien of silver should be given to her. Then the girl went away.

It was about noon when Hsi-mên Ch'ing came home after trying the case at his office. General Ching's man came to ask for his return card. Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to him: "Thank your master for these valuable presents, but they are really too much. I should like you to take them back now, and I will accept them when I have been able to do what he wishes."

"My master gave me no orders," the man said, "and I dare not take them back. It will be just as well if they are kept here."

"In that case," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said, "thank your master for me. Here is a card to take back to him." He gave the man a tael of silver.

Then he went to the Moon Lady's room. She was lying on the bed. He spoke to her several times but she would not answer. He asked the maids what was wrong but none dared to tell him. Then he went to Golden Lotus's room. She, too, was lying on the bed and her hair was in disorder. He asked her what the trouble was and again he got no answer. Then he went to pack up some silver and, when General Ching's man had gone, he went to Tower of Jade's room. Tower of Jade knew that the secret could not be kept so she told him about the quarrel between the Moon Lady and Golden Lotus. In a great state of excitement, Hsi-mên Ch'ing went to the Moon Lady's room again. He held her up in his arms. "Why did you have this quarrel?" he said. "You know you are not in a fit state of health. Why do you take that little strumpet seriously? Why did you have a row with her?"

"I did not quarrel with her," the Moon Lady said. "It was she who started the trouble, I didn't go to her: she came to me. If you wish to prove it, ask the others. This morning, out of kindness, I got tea ready and asked her mother to come and join us, but, in a temper, she had sent her mother away. Then

she came herself, tossing her head and shouting. She rolled about on the floor and beat her head on the ground. She got her hair-net in a mess. It was a marvel she didn't strike me, and, if it hadn't been for the others keeping us apart, we might have rolled about together. She is so used to bullying people that she thinks she can bully me. She said several times that you married her irregularly and that she would ask you to divorce her and she would go away. For one word I said, she said ten. Her mouth was like the Huai River in flood. How could a weak person like me withstand her? She knows how to put the blame on others. She made me so angry I didn't know where I was. As for this baby, he will never be born, not even if he is a prince. She made me so ill my belly feels ready to burst, and my guts hurt as though they were dropping out of me. My head aches and my arms are numb. I have just come back from the closet, but the child didn't come away. It would have been better if it had come, then I shouldn't have been troubled any longer with it. To-night I will get a cord and hang myself. Then you will be free to go to her. If I don't hang myself, I shall surely be murdered as the Lady of the Vase was. I know you will think things very unfortunate if you can't get rid of more than one wife in three years."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing was terribly excited. He put his arms round the Moon Lady. "Good Sister," he said, "don't worry about that little whore. She doesn't know the difference between high and low, what is sweet and what is sour. Don't be angry. You are worth more to me than all the others put together. I will go and beat her."

"Dare you?" the Moon Lady said. "She will tie you with a pig's-hair cord."

"Let her say so to me," Hsi-mên said. "If I get angry with her, I will kick her till she doesn't know where she is. How do you feel now? Have you had anything to eat?"

"I haven't tasted a thing," the Moon Lady said. "This morning, I got the tea ready and waited for her mother. Then she came and screamed at me. Now I feel very ill. My belly hurts and my head aches. My arms are all numb. If you don't believe me, come here and feel my hands. They are still cold."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing stamped his feet on the ground. "What

shall I do?" he cried. "I know. I'll send the boys for Doctor Jên."

"What is the use of sending for Doctor Jên? He can do nothing. If it is to live, it will live, and, if not, it will die. If it dies, so much the better for everybody. A wife is like the paint on the walls. When it is faded, another coat is put on. If I die, you will make her your first wife. She is clever enough to manage this household."

"I'm surprised you have patience even to quarrel with her," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "You ought to treat her as dung and leave her alone. If we don't send for Doctor Jên, the anger will get into your system and we shan't be able to get it out again. Then it will be too late to do anything."

"Send for old woman Liu, and I will take her medicine," the Moon Lady said. "I will ask her to use a needle on my head and get rid of the headache."

"That's absurd," Hsi-mên Ch'ing said. "What does that old whore know about women's ailments? I shall send a boy with a horse for Doctor Jên at once."

"You can do so if you like, but I won't see him."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing paid no attention. He went to the outer court and said to Ch'in T'ung: "Get a horse at once and go for Doctor Jên. Be quick. Bring him back with you." Ch'in T'ung got a horse and was away like a cloud of smoke. Hsi-mên Ch'ing went back to the Moon Lady's room and told the maids to make some gruel. But when the gruel was brought, the Moon Lady would not eat it.

Ch'in T'ung came back and said Doctor Jên was at the palace and his people said he would come the next morning.

The Moon Lady saw that messengers had come several times from Master Ch'iao to invite Hsi-mên Ch'ing. "The doctor will be here to-morrow," she said. "You had better go or our kinsman Ch'iao will be angry."

"If I go, who will see to you?"

The Moon Lady laughed. "You silly fellow," she said. "None of this. Off you go. There is nothing seriously wrong with me. Leave me alone. Perhaps I shall feel better. If I do, I'll get up and have something to eat with my sister-in-law. Don't be so excited."

Hsi-mên Ch'ing said to Flute of Jade: "Go for Aunt Wu

at once, and ask her to stay with your mother. Where is Miss Yü? Tell her to come and sing for your mother."

"Miss Yü has been gone a long time," Flute of Jade said.

"Who told her to go?" Hsi-mên said, "I wanted her here for another two days." He kicked Flute of Jade.

"She saw this was no place to be at, so she went away," the Moon Lady said. "Flute of Jade is not to blame."

"You wouldn't kick the one who insulted Miss Shên," Flute of Jade murmured.

Hsi-mên Ch'ing pretended not to hear this. He dressed and went to Master Ch'iao's house. Before the first night-watch, he returned and went to the Moon Lady's room. The Moon Lady was sitting with Aunt Wu, Tower of Jade and Picture of Grace. Aunt Wu hurriedly went away as soon as he came in.

"How do you feel now?" Hsi-mên Ch'ing said.

"I have had two mouthfuls of gruel with my sister-in-law," the Moon Lady said, "and my stomach feels rather easier. But I still have the headache and backache."

"That is all right," Hsi-mên said, "Doctor Jên will be here to-morrow and he will give you some medicine to expel the anger and strengthen your womb. You will soon be well again."

"I told you I didn't want the doctor, but you would send for him. This is nothing serious, and I don't want any man to come and fiddle with me. You will see whether I am able to go out or not to-morrow. What did kinsman Ch'iao want with you?"

"Oh, it was only an entertainment to celebrate my coming back from the Eastern Capital. He was very kind, and had made a lot of preparations. There were two singing-girls, and his Honour Chu was there. But I was so anxious about you, I couldn't eat a thing. I had a few cups of wine and came back as soon as I could."

"You smooth-tongued rascal," the Moon Lady said. "These flowery phrases and flattering expressions are too much for me. What is making you so extraordinarily pleasant? Even if I were one of Buddha's incarnations, you would give me no place in your heart. If I died, you wouldn't think me worth a jar of earthenware. What did Ch'iao say to you?"

"He is thinking of applying for honorary rank, and he has prepared thirty taels of silver. He wants me to speak to Prefect Hu about it. I told him there would be no trouble about that because, yesterday, Hu sent me a hundred copies of the new calendar, and I hadn't sent him anything in return yet. When I did, I said, I would send a card and ask him for a nomination. Ch'iao wouldn't agree. He said he must offer his thirty taels. If I help him, he said, it would be very much to his advantage."

"Did you take his money?" the Moon Lady said. "You ought to do something for him if he asks you."

"He is going to send the money to-morrow. He was going to send presents too, but I stopped him. I think if I send Hu a pig and a jar of wine, that ought to be enough."

That night, Hsi-mên Ch'ing stayed with the Moon Lady.

The next day was Censor Sung's party. Tables were arranged in the great hall and everything was made ready. Thirty musicians from the Prefecture came early in the morning, with four conductors and four soldiers. Shortly afterwards, Dr Jên came on horseback. Hsi-mên Ch'ing took him to the hall and they greeted one another.

"Your servant called for me yesterday," Dr Jên said, "but I was on duty. When I came home last night I found your card, and I have come this morning without waiting for my carriage. May I ask who is ill?"

"My first wife has suddenly become disturbed in health and I should be glad if you would examine her," Hsi-mên said.

They drank tea. Then Dr Jên said: "Yesterday Ming-ch'uan told me you had been promoted. I must congratulate you now and send my presents later."

"It is really not an occasion for celebration," Hsi-mên said, "I am so ill-fitted for the office I hold."

He said to Ch'in T'ung: "Go to the inner court and tell the Great Lady that Doctor Jên has come. Ask them to get the room ready." Ch'in T'ung went. Aunt Wu, Picture of Grace and Tower of Jade were with the Moon Lady. He gave them Hsi-mên's message. The Moon Lady did not move.

"I told him not to send for the doctor," she said. "I don't want any man here, staring at me and putting his fingers on my hand. I want some medicine from old woman Liu. nothing

more. Why should he make a fuss like this to satisfy that man's curiosity?"

"But he is here now, Mother," Tower of Jade said, "we can't tell him to go away without your seeing him."

Aunt Wu also insisted. "He is a physician to the royal family," she said. "You must let him feel your pulse. We don't know what is wrong, or where the trouble lies. This is the only way we can find out. It will be good for you to take his medicine and put your blood and air in order. You mustn't let the thing go too far. Old woman Liu knows nothing about medicine."

The Moon Lady went to dress her hair and put on her head-dress. Flute of Jade held the mirror for her, and Tower of Jade climbed on the bed and brushed her back hair. Picture of Grace arranged her ornaments and Beauty of the Snow put her clothes straight. In a very short time she looked like a carving in jade.

END OF VOLUME THREE.

